AT THE FOOT OF THE SAND-HILLS

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AT THE FOOT OF THE SAND-HILLS

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"It seemed an hour while Walter held his gun in his trembling hands."—*Page* 68.

AT THE FOOT OF THE SAND-HILLS

BY

Rev. HENRY S. SPALDING, S.J.

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NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

BENZIGER BROTHERS

PUBLISHERS OF BENZIGER'S MAGAZINE

1917

PZ 7
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OCT 24 1917

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No 1

mcw 0126 17

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AT THE FOOT OF THE SAND-HILLS

CHAPTER I

EXPERIENCE OF A YOUNG HUNTER

"THE best sporting gun on the market," said Dr. Murt as he stepped from his touring car and took an automatic fowling-piece from young Walter Blakestone. "I have tried them all," he continued, "tried them all. Before the season is over I'll show you how to kill six ducks in five shots."

"Oh, I'll be satisfied with one duck in five shots," replied the boy shyly.

"You couldn't make such a poor record even if you tried," were the encouraging words of the doctor. "Now, come, we must have a short practice. An ear of corn makes a good target. It is more difficult to hit than a duck."

Reaching across the wire fence near the road

side, the man plucked an ear of corn and stripped it of its husk.

"Do you know how to put your gun together?" he asked.

"No, sir; it has not been unpacked since I left the sporting-goods store in Chicago."

"We need the gun before the target," remarked Dr. Murt as he began to unbuckle the leather case.

It required but a few minutes to remove the gun and snap the two sections into place. The loading was equally simple, and soon six shells were slipped into the magazine. Then the boy was required to remove the shells, take the gun apart, and refit it again while the doctor looked on.

"You have learned your lesson well," said the instructor, as he watched Walter repeat the whole process. "Now for practice. I'll throw this ear of corn twenty feet above your head. See whether you can hit it."

"Let us begin with something easy," laughed the lad. "Suppose we put the ear of corn on the top of that fence-post and I'll stand here and shoot at it."

The doctor was amused. "Why, you could hit it with a stone," he replied. "Just try my way. Later if you miss a duck it won't wait

for you; but you can try again if you miss this mark."

All was ready, and up into the air went the moving target. The boy lifted the gun to his shoulder, followed the object until it fell to the ground, but did not fire.

"Why didn't you shoot?" asked the man.

"Something wrong with the trigger."

"Of course," said the doctor, taking the gun. "I am not a good teacher, for I did not explain how to release the trigger." On the side of the gun was a clasp which, if left in the center of its range of motion, held the trigger at safety; if pushed forward, it allowed one shot to be fired, and if drawn back it released the entire discharge. In this last position one had only to keep his finger on the trigger, and the gun would empty the magazine automatically.

"We will set it for one discharge," continued Dr. Murt, handing the gun back to the boy. Again the ear of corn was tossed upward. The young marksman did not fire until it had almost reached the ground.

"You should have shot sooner," said the man, picking up the mark, which was untouched. "This time try to fire just when the ear begins to fall."

"I don't expect to hit it."

"Follow my directions and you can't miss it. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir."

Up went the mark again, and just as it was balancing in the air the lad fired. There was not a doubt about the result, for the spinning mark showed that more than one of the duck-shot had struck it.

"Good work!" cried the doctor.

"It may have been an accident, but I certainly got it," said the boy. "I like this gun," he continued; "it doesn't kick back like the old-fashioned guns used to do."

"Old-fashioned is the right word," chimed in the man. "All other guns are old-fashioned. But get ready for another shot."

Walter tried several shots and succeeded in three.

"Now just a few words of instruction," said the doctor. "Always wait until the ducks are getting ready to light. For a second they hover over the water, almost at a standstill, just as the ear of corn does before it begins to fall. If the ducks fly to either side always shoot in front of them. I can't tell you just how far in front to aim. No one can tell you; only practice can teach you this, for it depends on the speed at which they are flying. You

have a good eye and will get the range. I can see that you will get it. Do you play base-ball?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you are a good batter."

"How do you know?"

"Because you have a good eye and steady nerves."

Walter acknowledged that he was the best batter on his team.

"But I think I will try my hand with your new gun," said Dr. Murt. "You throw the ear of corn just as high as you can, for I want to get almost under it."

"Bang! bang! bang! bang!" went the gun, and the ear of corn twirled and twirled at each successive shot.

"Whea-a-a-a-a-a!" whistled the boy.

"Yes, I hit it four times in succession," said the man, turning his gun in his hands. "A great invention! The best sporting-piece in the land! With a little practice you will hit every time. In hunting doves in August I generally wait for two to fly near each other, and very frequently get both of them. At times I have killed eight ducks in six shots. Well, the lake is not far away. You will have at least three hours to wait before I return and

if you have not two ducks I will be disappointed. Bob here will bring them in for you."

At these words, Bob, a fine water spaniel, jumped out of the car, wagged his tail and barked with delight.

"Will you stay with this young fellow, Bob?"

Another bark and still more frequent wagging of his tail gave an affirmative answer.

"You will stay with any one who has a gun!"

Bark and wag; bark and wag. Little Bob knew what was wanted.

For a quarter of a mile over the hills walked the two, followed by the dog.

"Is that the lake?" asked the boy as the sun suddenly flashed over a gleaming surface not far ahead.

"Precisely. You saw it before I did."

"Where did the water come from and how did a lake get there?"

"You are asking a rather hard question, my young friend; but if you are fond of reading, I will give you a whole book on the question. Did you ever study geology?"

"No, sir."

"Physical geography, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is a question of geology or physical geography; but just now we are hunting. You can keep the study for some other time. I want to tell you something more about the hunting. In the first place, you see that house just beyond the lake?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, old Dobbs lives there, and he is the meanest man in Nebraska. You must not shoot in the direction of his house, for if you do—well—don't do it and there'll be no trouble. I'll put you in a position where you will not have to shoot toward his barn or house. You will not be on his property and he will not dare to say a word to you. Simply follow my directions and there'll be no trouble."

They had scarcely started their tramp over the hills toward the lake when Walter tripped and went sprawling to the ground.

"You stepped on a shoestring," said the doctor.

"No," replied the boy, as he examined his shoes, "the laces are tight."

"But there are other shoestrings. You got tangled in a prairie shoestring."

Walter then noticed a dense, finely-branched plant which formed a trap for any unaccustomed pedestrian.

The lake was soon reached—a narrow, shallow body of water, clear as a crystal stream. At the upper end was a clump of willows, only a few feet high, but offering perfect protection for a huntsman. The decoys were thrown some twenty feet from the shore where young Walter Blakestone ensconced himself, while Bob, obedient to orders, crouched at his feet.

"I will be back from my sick-call in about three hours," said Dr. Murt, as he took his departure. "That will give us half an hour to reach home before dark, and remember, if you haven't two ducks for supper I'll be disappointed. Remember, don't shoot until they are about to light. If you are quick enough you can get six shots at a flock."

The physician soon regained his motor car, and was speeding along the road among the sand-hills on a sick-call some twenty miles away.

The young huntsman sat among the stunted willows. Not a tree was in sight except the fruit orchard clustered around the house of farmer Dobbs. On every side were the undulating sand-hills stretching away to the distant horizon, and farther away to the west for miles and hundreds of miles to the mountain slopes.

A strange silence brooded over the land-

scape. There were sounds like the moaning of winds in tree-tops, and yet there were neither tree-tops nor wind. There was no evidence of a wind, and yet it seemed to come in some indistinct way and to disappear.

There was an occasional splash across the lake, where a colony of muskrats had built their domed houses. Queer houses they were, with doors that were safe, for to enter them one had to dive into the cool water. But Mr. Muskrat was accustomed to the cold water. His only difficulty was in winter when the surface of the water froze, and the family had to tear an opening through the roof. There was considerable activity in this little village, and often to break the monotony of waiting the young huntsman pointed his fowling-piece at one of the unsuspecting inhabitants.

Suddenly at the far end of the lake some thirty ducks appeared. Walter's heart beat and fluttered with the quivering flock. On, on they sailed right toward him. Yes, and just the height for an easy shot. Then there was a cry of alarm, wings beat the air rapidly, and soon the whole flock was lost to view.

"Sorry, boy, but I didn't see you or I wouldn't have frightened them," said a voice.

Walter turned and saw an Indian standing

at his side. He seemed to be a man of about twenty-five, tall, straight and muscular—a perfect model for a statue of bronze. There was a look of sadness in his serious features. He dropped an old carpet-bag which he carried, and threw his shoulders back with his arms akimbo. "Sorry, boy," he repeated. "Very sorry. But you have only lost some ducks which you don't need. I have lost a home—lost everything. You've got a place to sleep to-night; but where will Ignatius Bararana sleep? Still, I didn't come to tell you my troubles; but only to ask your pardon for frightening the ducks. I hope another flock flies this way. Good-by!" That voice was like the voice of a mother! That parting seemed as affectionate as the parting of the fondest friend!

Walter had not said a word; he seemed speechless. The Indian had spoken with almost a perfect accent. The boy watched him slowly disappear over the hill near the lake. He felt an interior impulse to run after the Indian and talk to him. But he kept his place behind the willows, thinking—thinking of the noble Indian who had called himself Ignatius Bararana.

Two hours passed with not a duck in sight.

Even patient Bob grew tired and yawned and stretched his limbs. Finally Walter saw by his watch that it was time to start for the road where he was to await the return of Dr. Murt. Not wishing to let the afternoon pass without a single shot he determined to try his luck at one of the muskrats. His aim was true, and he heard the wounded animal splashing and floundering in the water, but in his excitement he held his finger upon the trigger of the automatic gun, which continued to discharge from its magazine.

"Bang! bang!" and unfortunately the shots rattled against the barn of Mr. Dobbs.

In a few seconds the farmer appeared at the barn door yelling at the top of his voice. Young Blakestone did not wait to explain the accident, but with Bob leading the way dashed over the hills toward the road.

CHAPTER II

THE MURTS AT HOME

"Did you get a shot?" called out Dr. Murt as the boy came running toward the machine.

"Yes, three shots," stammered the boy, all out of breath.

"At what?"

"Well, the first shot was at a muskrat, but the last two hit the barn of Mr. Dobbs."

"Didn't hurt any one, I suppose."

"I hope not. Mr. Dobbs was yelling so that I didn't wait to find out what had happened."

"I am sure you didn't hit any one," replied the physician. "Just a few stray shots struck the barn; no damage done. I'll pass by the house to-morrow and explain it all to the old man. Did you see any ducks?"

Walter explained what had happened, and how he had lost a chance just as a flock of ducks was sailing near.

"That's hunter's luck," answered Dr. Murt,

starting the machine. "But how did you happen to fire three times?"

"I must have been excited, so excited that I kept my finger on the trigger."

"We have to learn these things," said the doctor. "But you are all out of breath. Did you run the whole way from the lake?"

"Ask Bob, he led the way," laughed the boy.

"Are you frightened, too, Bob?" and Dr. Murt looked down at the dog at his feet.

But the little duck dog was safely curled up under the seat and did not seem willing to be disturbed by useless questions.

"This is a glorious day!" resumed the physician. "A glorious day! And this Nebraska air! Give me this Nebraska air! We are just half way between the Mississippi Valley and the Rocky Mountains; and it is almost mountain air that we are breathing. That is the reason you found it hard to run. It takes a week to accustom ourselves to the change of climate. But this is a glorious climate! Dry, and as healthy as any place in the world! See how the sun and wind have tanned me."

Tanned and a perfect model of strength and health was Dr. Frederic Murt. He was clean shaven and had the appearance of a prosper-

ous and intelligent ranchman. There was something strikingly clear and alert in his dark eyes. Even as a boy he had been a popular character in the little village of Sandpit, and now he was one of its highly respected citizens. But his interest went beyond the town. He was thoroughly acquainted with the history of his native State and knew its needs and agricultural advantages. He was ambitious to represent his section of the country at the State legislature, not through any selfish motive but that he might serve the best interests of Nebraska. But at present his thoughts were centered on his young friend.

"Here is a chance to see whether you have a hunter's eye," he said to the lad, slowing down the machine. "Look over toward that marsh. Do you see anything?"

"You mean something alive?" asked the boy.

"Precisely, a bird; a big bird, a blue heron."

"Did you see it light?"

"No; I glanced over and picked it up in the weeds. It hasn't moved."

"Is it blue?" asked the boy after vainly trying to find the object.

"Only its throat and neck. I would rather call it the grey heron, for although it has a bluish tint it is more grey than blue. In fact,

we generally call it the sand crane, for it flies just like a crane, with its legs sticking straight out behind it. It has a yellow bill nearly six inches long."

"And I see the bill and the bird," said Walter pointing toward an old dead stump.

"I didn't think you would ever be able to find it," answered the doctor. "You have a hunter's eye. Yes, sir, that bird is waiting for a frog or a fish, or it may be for a snake; it is fond of snakes. I wonder whether we could get a shot at it. It is too far away from the road; and if I stop the machine the heron will fly at once. Suppose we fool the old fellow. You step off on this side while the machine is moving. I'll drive on slowly and while the heron is watching you may be able to creep up on it."

Although Walter crept close to the ground the bird flew before he had advanced ten feet from the road.

"Too sharp for us!" cried out the doctor. "I would like to get the specimen for a friend of mine, but later on we'll have another chance."

Mrs. Murt greeted the hunters on their return and announced that a plentiful supper awaited them. "You couldn't expect to kill

anything the first day," were her encouraging words when told that they had not met with success.

The Murts had been married but a few weeks when young Walter Blakestone came to visit them. Mrs. Murt had been a teacher for some years in a local country school. She contributed to the society column in the little weekly paper of Sandpit. Educated in the convent school at Hastings, Nebraska, and with advantages which few of her associates enjoyed, she was a leader among her companions. Yet she was so unobtrusive and so thoughtful of others, that all felt honored by her friendship, and none were envious of her attainments.

They lived in a brick house at the edge of the village. A narrow concrete walk ran in front of the yard; there were young shade trees and shrubbery, and a garden, at the rear of which was the doctor's garage.

When Walter Blakestone, after changing his hunting-suit, walked into the dining-room and stood in the glare of the drop lights, he was not aware that his hostess was gazing at him almost with a mother's pride. He was a boy of fifteen, a trifle above the medium height, and of rather slender build; but his shoulders

were broad and well developed. His long, jet-black, bristly hair was brushed back without being parted. His forehead was high in the center, but dipped slightly at the sides, bringing the middle into striking prominence. He wore a bluish suit and a showy necktie, whose brilliant colors, however, were partly lost in the artificial light. He always selected a tie of the lightest texture, with the result that any quick movement or sudden jerk threw it to one side; and now as he stood near the table the ends of the cravat fell gracefully over his left shoulder.

"Sit here," said the hostess to Walter. "This is to be your place at the table during your visit. No, I shouldn't call it a visit. I should rather say that this is to be your place while you are a member of the family. For you are to be a real member, not a stranger—not a visitor, but a member of the family."

"He knows how I made myself a member of his father's family for four years," asserted the doctor, "and I hope he does the same in my house."

"It is fine to be in a warm room after sitting on that cold hillside for two hours or more," affirmed the boy as he took his place at the table.

"Of course you haven't much of an appetite," put in the doctor.

"If he ran as far as you say he did," replied the wife, "he must be too tired to eat."

"I really don't know how far I ran," said the boy, "but I am sure that I didn't lose my appetite."

"Why, I can eat nails after riding thirty miles in this Nebraska air," claimed the doctor.

"You may give him too much exercise all at once," protested Mrs. Murt to her husband. "Remember that he came to visit both of us. He was scarcely off the train this morning when you had him out hunting, and you intend to start early to-morrow."

"I want to have him tanned and hardened. It takes a week or more to give these city people a little color."

"But it takes only one day to give us an appetite," insisted Walter, who was thoroughly enjoying his supper.

"What do you think of our new home?" asked the hostess.

"It's just fine. I have a better room than we gave the doctor when he stayed with us in Chicago. His room had only one window and it was right up against a flat. I have two

large windows and no other house within a block."

"Yes, that's one thing we have out here in Sandpit," contended Dr. Murt. "A large, open yard and plenty of fresh air—real fresh air! Nebraska air! There is a variety of air just as there is a variety of apples. This Nebraska air can't be found in any other State. It isn't stale and smoky like city air; it isn't too rare like mountain air; it isn't like the air over in Iowa or Illinois; it is drier and more bracing; it's Nebraska air—Nebraska air!"

After supper Dr. Murt rang up Mr. Dobbs to explain about the accident of the shot hitting his barn.

At once the farmer became abusive. He acknowledged that no one was hit by the shot, and that none of the horses or cows were touched, but he was going to have Dr. Murt arrested for bringing a stranger on his property.

Dr. Murt laughed as he received the threatening message, leaving Walter under the impression that the farmer had not taken the matter seriously.

"It is all right," said he to the boy, as he hung up the receiver, "the shot hit no one—it only rattled against the side of the barn.

We'll go by the house in the morning and I'll explain matters more fully. But there has been another trouble at his house to-day. I couldn't make it all out, but his Indian workman has gone away."

"Perhaps he's the one who frightened the ducks," put in Walter. "He said that he had lost his home and hadn't a place to sleep."

"No doubt about it," continued the doctor. "He was leaving the house and happened to walk near you."

"He is really a good Indian," affirmed the wife. "I see him at church so often. He would attract any one's attention. He is so very devout and attentive."

Returning to the table in the dining-room, Dr. Murt picked up a small package. "Well," he remarked, "those men at the State department have sent the seed in quickly. You see," he continued turning to Walter, "I'm experimenting with *Andropogon hallii* and *Andropogon scoparius.*"

"What jaw-crackers," cried out Walter, at the same time pressing both hands to his cheeks.

"They are rather big words," granted the doctor, with a laugh, "but I have been dealing with those scientific men and have learned to

use technical words. The first means 'blue-stem,' and the second 'bunch grass.' You were walking through both kinds all afternoon."

"I don't remember them," replied the boy. "But I was looking out for those shoestrings after I got that fall."

"And you will be studying grass and nothing but grass, if you let the doctor have his way," remarked the wife. "We have agreed to keep one half of our greenhouse for flowers and one half for experimenting with grass."

"Has the carpenter been working at the screens?" Dr. Murt wanted to know.

"Yes, and he will have them in to-morrow," she replied.

"I must plant this seed to-night, for there will be no time in the morning," said the husband, taking a lantern and leading the way to the porch. "You see," he continued, pointing out the place to his young friend, "we are going to make a little greenhouse here at the south end of the building. It will have plenty of sunlight and be heated through the kitchen window in cold weather. This is one of the best sections in the State for studying the different kinds of soil; for right around us the sand-hills and the prairies overlap. Very few

people can point out just where one ends and the other begins."

In the faint light of the lantern the boy could discern several rows of rough boxes, and asked the doctor what they were for.

"The first ten boxes," explained the doctor, "are filled with soil from the upper hills of the prairie, and the last ten with soil from the sand-hills. The seeds were all planted on the same day. In this third row the soil was taken from the sand-hills and at varying depths of two to twenty feet. I collected the soil when one of the farmers was sinking a well. My object in studying the nature of the ground at various depths is this. Sometimes heavy wind-storms strip the fields of all growth. It has been taken for granted that the ground would be of no value once the grass was killed. I am of the opinion that the sand many feet below the surface has just as much and sometimes more fertility than the top soil. If I can prove this it will be of great benefit to the State. At my suggestion State officials have begun to carry on investigations in several sections, and have supplied me with seed for my own experiments."

While he was talking, the doctor was separating the seed and planting it in boxes.

"Do you remember the names of the grass?" he asked Walter.

"Those jaw-cracker words?"

"No, you will never remember them. But you have only to look at the grass that is in the boxes, and you will pick out the 'bunch grass.' If it were in the daytime you could easily select the 'blue-stem' owing to the slight bluish tint."

Then there was a discussion between the doctor and his wife about the interest in caring for flowers and experimenting with various kinds of soil and grass.

Although Walter acknowledged that Dr. Murt's work seemed more useful, he felt that flowers were more attractive.

The boy retired early that night as he was to be up before daylight for his second day's hunt.

CHAPTER III

IGNATIUS BARARANA

Isidore Dobbs was not a miser, although he went by no other name among his neighbors. He had given up his business in Omaha to bring his wife into the country, for physicians said that this was her only hope. The change did benefit the woman, but gradually her health gave way and Isidore was left with an only child.

He had never been able to accustom himself to the ways of his neighbors, and now after the death of his wife he shut himself up within his own narrow life and cared for no one. Under these strained conditions he became more crabbed and unsocial. It was gradually noised through the neighborhood that he was immensely rich. The strangest stories were circulated about his burying bags of gold under his wheat-bin or beneath his corn-crib.

It was customary for the country people as they passed each other on the roads to exchange a hearty "Good morning" or "Good

afternoon." Farmer Dobbs, when he first began to separate himself from the rest of the community, returned salutations with a grunt of recognition, albeit it was rather unintelligible, but now he passed all by without a word. People therefore no longer saluted him. He was not regarded as a member of the community. No one approached his home. Not even the country children who walked by his house from school even ventured within the front yard.

That afternoon, while Walter Blakestone was enjoying his first duck-hunt, there was trouble between Isidore Dobbs and his hired man—an Indian by the name of Ignatius Bararana. He was of the Blackfeet tribe and from the Catholic Mission of St. Ignatius in Montana. After attending a Government industrial and agricultural school in Nebraska he had decided to remain in the State where many of his people had already settled. Wishing to gain experience he had hired himself out to farmer Dobbs.

Things had not gone smoothly from the first day; but Ignatius remained with the farmer on account of the latter's little son.

His name was Rollin, after his mother; but his father and Ignatius called him Rolly.

He was a wee, delicate creature of eleven, but so small that one might easily have taken him for a child or eight or nine. His was an unnatural life, for he had none of the associations of childhood days, and other children had never come to play with him. The Indian was like a mother to him—put him to bed at night, and dressed him in the morning, cooked for him, sewed his tattered clothes, and played with him at noon and at night when the day's work was over.

Rolly had many horses—big horses and little horses, fat horses and lean horses; and each horse was a piece of wood. The Indian had whittled rough heads for these horses. He even condescended to mount one of these horses and ride around the yard. He would do anything to please or amuse little Rolly.

"Come, Ig; come and mend my horse's head," said Rolly after dinner that day. "It's broken, and I can't fix it."

"How did you break it?"

"It got real wild and I whipped it just like you whip the horses, and it ran, and ran, and hit its head against the wall."

"Is the horse dead?"

"Yes, but if you fix the head it will come to life again."

"A bad head it's got," said the Indian, examining the piece of wood.

"Such a bad horse," expostulated the child.

"Such a bad boy, I am afraid," replied the Indian. "Horses can't be used to knock against stone walls."

"I didn't hit the wall with it; it just got wild and ran away like a real horse."

"Well, we'll have to make an extra bit for its mouth so that you can hold the horse."

"This one don't run away," exclaimed Rollin as he pranced around on one of his steeds.

"Hold this wild horse while I go in and get a hammer and some nails," said the Indian.

Rollin, forgetting that the horse was dead, straddled the piece of wood and tugged at the string bridle. "It is trying to run away again," he cried.

"Well, it can't run away with a broken head," explained the Indian.

"Hurry back soon, Ig; for it's a wild horse."

The broken horse was soon fastened securely. "Now I will try this wild horse. See, it don't run away with me," said the Indian as he rode the stick horse around the yard.

"Yes, but when you go away it will get wild," exclaimed the boy who was determined

to have at least one dangerous horse in his collection.

Thus they continued to play until Mr. Dobbs passed out of the house and informed the Indian that it was time to begin work.

As Ignatius drew near the barn he was attracted by a low whistle. A few minutes later he was engaged in earnest conversation with another Indian. The two men were not aware of the fact that they were being observed by the farmer.

Evidently they were discussing something of importance, and the visitor was making demands of Ignatius. "No! no! no!" said the latter repeatedly.

The white man could not hear the words, but he saw that the conversation was vehement.

Suddenly Bararana turned and walked away toward the corn-fields. The visitor watched him for a few minutes. "You coward! You pale-face coward," he hissed; but finding his taunts unanswered he climbed the fence and disappeared down the road.

Half an hour later when Ignatius was busy cutting corn, Isidore Dobbs walked up to him and said:

"Ig, your services are not wanted here any longer!"

"Do you mean that I must quit work?"

"Didn't I say so?"

"But generally people get some kind of warning."

"Sometimes they don't deserve a warning."

"So I am to quit work right now?"

"That's what I said."

"Am I to leave the place at once?"

"At once! I'll give you only half an hour to get your things, and I'm going to watch you all the time."

"Then you suspect me."

"That's my business."

"But you must suspect me, or you would not watch me. I have been here for four months and I've not been watched."

"I didn't know you as well as I know you now."

"Tell me what I have done that you suspect me now!"

There was a silence. The corn-knife had dropped from the Indian's hand; the farmer stood husking an ear which he had unconsciously plucked from a stalk. The Indian stood rigidly with his eyes cast to the ground.

"I'll tell you," resumed the farmer, "but first I'll ask you a question. Was Injun Joe here to-day?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he has been here several times of late."

"Yes, sir."

"And you've been told to let no one come near this house."

"Yes, sir."

"Now you know why you are going. You are not reliable. I suspect you," and the farmer turned away.

"Listen to me a moment, Mr. Dobbs," demanded the Indian, now raising his eyes and gazing with a rigid stare at the man. "Listen to me. Injun Joe was here, but it was not my fault. He is my tribesman—almost my brother. He doesn't do what is right, neither do some white men do what is right. They say he steals; but there are white men who steal. I couldn't put him out. I told him not to come."

"What was he sneaking around here for?" asked the man.

"I can't tell you—I can't tell you now; some day I hope you find it out. If I must tell you or go, then I'll go!"

"Yes, Ig, you'll go!" and he emphasized the order with an oath.

"Ig! Ig!" was the reply. "You call me Ig, because I am an Indian. I was taught at the mission that I'm a man—just as much a man

as you," said the defiant red man. "You have never heard me curse or swear as you are doing. I am Ig, yes, Ig—and only Ig. I'm not worth a real name. But I've learned one lesson. The next man I work for will call me Ignatius. I will be Ignatius Bararana."

"You will be nobody as long as you associate with low-down dogs like Injun Joe," retorted the farmer.

"Yes, he is a dog now—just a dog! Not as good as a dog!" assented the Indian. "But dogs sometimes save people, don't they? He was good one time! Good when he was young! Good before he left Montana and the mission. But don't some white people become bad?"

"I take care of my own business, and not of other white people," said the farmer. "If they are bad let them suffer. Let them be sent to jail and fined. I tend to my own business. I don't want any of that kind around me—red or white. Do you understand?"

The Indian did not answer. He picked up the corn-knife and walked slowly toward the house. Accompanied by the farmer he went to the attic room where he had slept, changed his overalls, and threw into an old bag the few things which he possessed. Not a word was

said. Down on the porch little Rollin Dobbs was playing with his horses.

"Good-by, Rolly," said the Indian, as he came out on the porch and took the tiny, delicate hand.

"Where're you going, Ig?"

"Way-way off!"

"And you'll be back for supper and play 'thrashing-machine' and mend this horse's head?"

"No, Rolly, I'll never be back again."

"Yes, you will," and Rolly leaped to his feet and took the strong hand and held it. "Yes, you will come back, Ig."

"No, your father doesn't want me any more."

"Yes, he does; yes, he does."

"No, he doesn't!" broke in the farmer, walking out on the porch. "Ig's a bad man and we don't want him."

"He ain't—he ain't," protested Rolly.

"Come on with me," said the stern father, and he seized the boy.

Rolly hung desperately to the hand of the Indian. "He ain't bad! He ain't bad—and I won't let him go!" The words were followed by a cuff on the head, which for a moment dazed the child.

"Go, and go fast!" demanded the farmer of the Indian. "Go fast, the boy will soon forget you."

As Ignatius Bararana walked down the road leading to Sandpit he heard the cries of the child and indistinctly caught the words: "He ain't bad! He ain't bad!—and I won't let him go! Come back, Ig! Come back! Come back!" Passing by the lake he frightened the ducks just when Walter Blakestone was about to get a shot.

It was after dark when Ignatius Bararana reached the little village of Sandpit, which was a frontier town in the valley of the Loup River in north central Nebraska. Tradition has it that the depression in which the town was located had been dug out in a single night by a tornado. It lay at the foot of the sand-hills, and, being the terminal of a branch of the Union Pacific Railroad, was an active place for shipping grain and cattle. A church that would have done honor to a city parish stood in the middle of the village. This church was a land-mark for miles around, and was the pride of the town people and the Belgian farmers of the neighborhood.

As many of the parishioners usually made a visit to the church every evening, the doors

were always open. Into the church walked Ignatius. The scene was not strange to him. In a church of almost equal size he had prayed and heard Mass when a boy, at the Indian Mission in Montana. He blessed himself at the holy-water font, and walked slowly up the main aisle, and knelt in a pew near the communion-railing. Before him was the dim glow of the sanctuary lamp.

Bararana prayed, prayed for light, prayed for strength. The world was darkness for him now. He felt keenly the disgrace of his dismissal, but his conscience told him that he had done no evil. One by one the devout people left the church. The Indian fell asleep.

It was light when he awoke and some of the people of the parish were already in the church waiting for the Mass to begin. The parish priest came into the sanctuary and then went to the confessional. The Indian bowed his head in prayer for a few minutes, then made his confession and received holy communion at the Mass which followed.

After his thanksgiving he took his carpet-bag and walked out on the porch. There he stood for some moments. Then he returned to the church and prayed; and after prayer went out into the light of morning.

CHAPTER IV

ALONG THE VALLEY OF THE LOUP

As Dr. Murt appeared on the porch, gun in hand, he was greeted by his two dogs with hilarious barking and leaping and playing. Pointer was the bird dog, and Bob the duck hunter.

"Poor little Bob," said the doctor; "poor little Bob! This isn't his day, and he must stay at home." Bob seemed to understand the words, for at once his tail dropped and he slipped away to the woodshed, while Pointer became more boisterous, and leaped almost as high as his master's head.

Accompanied by Mrs. Murt, Walter walked out wearing his new hunting-suit and carrying his automatic in its spotless case.

"Doesn't he look fine!" she cried out, proud of the manly little fellow who had come to be a guest at her home.

"A real city hunter," remarked Dr. Murt laughing. "I am going to throw him in the river, roll him in the mud, and tear his clothes

in several places, then he'll look like a real hunter and not like one of those city dudes. But he'll no doubt get dirty soon enough. I've changed my mind," said he, turning to Walter. "I promised to go past old Dobbs's place and get the decoys. Let 'em stay there for a day or so. In the meanwhile he'll cool off. I am going to take you in the opposite direction."

Into the car leaped Pointer as the two hunters took their places. Mrs. Murt waved her handkerchief and wished them good luck. Then over the rolling hills spun the machine.

"We will begin our hunt in a stretch of cornfield in the Loup River valley," said Dr. Murt, as they drove along. "We are likely to get a good bag of prairie chickens there. It is probable that the birds will be feeding separately. If one jumps I'll give you the first shot. I'll follow your aim and if you miss the bird I will kill it, or let me say that I will probably kill it. I often told you when in Chicago that I was a sure shot; and now I must prove my claim. I want to say that I am better now than I ever was."

"Suppose I can't aim soon enough," objected the boy.

"Then I'll be forced to shoot. But I will

wait until the bird is getting beyond range. Even if we do lose a few I'll wait for you."

"That's kind of you," said Walter.

"My dear young friend," put in the doctor. "I have been waiting, waiting for years to take this hunt with you. I had almost given up hope—the little hope I had, for I scarcely believed your parents would let you come so far. But now you are here it's your day, and I am only your instructor."

"Can we see the birds before they fly?" the young hunter wished to know.

"Yes, sometimes they run for hundreds of yards before they flush. It depends on the grass and bushes. If they think they are protected they will often allow you to come within a foot of them."

"Can you see them then?"

"Not all the time. I have stood with Pointer sticking his nose right out before me and I couldn't see a thing; then a bird would rise within four feet of me."

"Will Pointer see them first?"

"No, he'll smell them. It depends largely on the direction of the wind. For this reason I am going down the river and beat up against the wind. Those city folks never think of this. They'll have their dog going with the wind and

often flushing the birds without any warning."

As the car sped on, Dr. Murt told Walter of many an experience in the valley of the Loup. An hour later he pointed out a stretch of cornfield where they were to begin the day's sport.

"I won't give you any practice to-day," said the doctor, as Pointer led them into the cornfield. "Only remember this; if the bird flies directly away from you, shoot right at it. If it flies to either side shoot in front of it. Now I'll be right behind you and almost shoot over your head. But there is no danger. Shoot just as quick as you can at the first bird that jumps. If several get up at once, fire to the right and I'll use my judgment about my pick."

All was silent now except the rustle of dead weeds under foot and the sighing of the wind among the corn-stalks.

"Look," whispered Walter pointing overhead, "there is a sea-gull. I didn't know they came so far away from the lakes."

"It's one of the secrets of nature," replied the doctor. "They are generally alone and they never alight."

On they walked in silence. To watch a trained hunting dog is one of the joys of the sportsman. At times Pointer bent to the

earth, then he leaned forward. Again he paused and waited for some sound. At times he stood motionless as a statue, a perfect model for a painter. The eyes of Dr. Murt followed every motion of the dog.

"They have been feeding here this morning," whispered the doctor, dropping behind the boy. "Don't you notice that Pointer is getting nervous? Slowly now, right behind him. They may have gone away for some distance, but they were here," he continued. "Pointer will let us know in a few minutes.

"Right on! Right on!" said the master to the dog. "He's getting them, he's getting them. There! there! He has set one. Go on slowly now toward the dog and before you reach Pointer the bird will fly up."

"Whir-r-r!"

"Bang!" went Walter's gun.

"Bang!" followed the doctor's and the bird dropped to the ground. "You missed it, but it was a hard shot! Get ready again. The covey seems scattered."

A few feet farther and Pointer again came to a stand.

"Don't get excited now—don't—get—exc—i—t—e—d," drawled out the instructor. "Slowly—slowly—"

"Whir-r-r-rr-rr-rr-rr," four birds were up, and all to the left.

Walter brought down one and the doctor got two.

"Fine!" cried the lad in undisguised admiration of his own shot. And he started forward to secure his prize. In doing so he flushed six more birds. He was not ready to fire, and, moreover, he stood in the way of the doctor.

"See what you did!" remonstrated the latter with a laugh. "Always stand until you are sure that all the birds are up. The dog can find the dead ones afterward."

"Well, here is mine anyway," and the happy youth held the dead chicken high above his head.

"Do you know why you missed that first shot?" asked the doctor.

"I was too excited."

"That may have partly been the reason; but it was an old chicken. The old chickens generally flush first. They are twice as quick as the young ones, that is, those hatched out this last summer. It takes a quick shot to get one. When hunting alone I frequently let the first one go, and then follow up the others. It

requires time to learn all these things. Hunting, like everything else, requires not only practice but observation. Many people never become hunters because they don't observe. They fire and load, and keep right on through the season, and are no better at the close than they were in the beginning."

By this time Pointer had brought in the game, and the hunters were ready to look for a second covey.

"I am not going to put a shell in my gun," said the doctor, as they walked on. "I am going to watch you and give you suggestions. The next time Pointer finds chickens take a hasty look at the ground. See just where the clusters of grass are thickest. I have never been able to give an exact rule, but I generally pick out the place where the chickens are. As soon as Pointer takes a stand glance quickly over the ground and let me know where you think the chickens have hid. I'll do the same. Let us see whether we agree. If you miss your first shot, and there are several birds, don't follow up the first one, but turn to the next. Have the gun set for a full discharge, and try to empty the magazine."

By noon Walter had killed three more chick-

ens, although he had missed many shots. Four shots were all that he had been able to get at any one covey.

They went to a farmer's house where Dr. Murt telephoned to his wife to find out whether there were any sick-calls. The reply came back that Isidore Dobbs had rung up twice.

"Oh! let him call all day," answered the doctor, quite provoked at the action of the farmer. "I'll go over to-morrow and get the decoys and explain about the accident in shooting toward his barn."

After lunch the hunting was resumed, and before dark twenty-four chickens had been bagged. When the day's sport was over and the two hunters were spinning homeward in the automobile, two chickens flew in front of the machine and lit in a stubble-field close to the road.

"Slip two shells into your gun, and run over there and try your luck. Take Pointer with you," suggested the doctor.

Pointer set the birds only a short distance from where they had dropped into the stubble. Up they flew, one to the right and the other to the left.

"Bang! Bang!" went the automatic, and the two birds fell.

Walter took off his cap and made a low bow to the doctor.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" cried Dr. Murt, "a great ending for a fine day's hunt."

On the way home Dr. Murt gave further instructions about hunting and narrated many of his experiences when out after game birds. Then he began to explain about the formation of sand-hills. "I used to tramp these hills as a boy," said he, "and often wondered how this great world of sand was formed. As I was interested I got books and began to read. Just think of it for a moment. There are eighteen thousand square miles or nearly twelve million acres in this sand-hill region. Deep below the hills are strata of sandstone and shale. In years to come there will be immense quarries here, for the stone is of a high grade for building. The whole country was at one time covered with water, and sand, gravel, silt, and clay were washed down from the east side of the Rocky Mountains over what is now a large part of Nebraska."

The doctor's learned explanation was interrupted by Walter, who wished to know where the water came from.

Dr. Murt had to acknowledge that science had not solved all the mysteries of nature.

Still he claimed that he had made a special study of the subject and was convinced that he understood the formation of the sand-hills. He knew, too, the various kinds of grass and shrubbery, and could name the flowers of the different seasons. To him the sand-hills were not monotonous and undulating slopes void of natural beauties.

Nature is bounteous and prodigal at times in clothing the hills and valleys with rarest tints. During the early days of May the sand-berry is seen on every hill, mingling with clusters of bunch-grass and bearing upon its bushy and short twigs great clusters of white and pinkish flowers. There are areas, too, of wild roses with flexible, thorny stems. In summer thousands of showy blossoms fill the air with exquisite perfume. But of all the flowers the yucca plant with its spikes of whitish blossoms is most conspicuous. The hills are covered with yucca, and it extends down into the valleys, for miles and tens of miles the undulating hills become a sea of white—all the world seems an endless flower-bed of yucca.

While the doctor talked to the boy of the wild beauties of the valley through which they were driving, he acknowledged that he thought seriously of running for the State assembly so

that he could introduce certain laws for the prevention of prairie fires and the restoration of soil in various sections where winds and sand had destroyed the vegetation. He promised that after supper he would give Walter a book to read—"The Geology of Nebraska."

CHAPTER V

ROLLY

THE book on the geology of Nebraska was not interesting to Walter. He looked at the various maps outlining the water-courses and the sand-hills and the prairie lands; he turned the pages where there were colored pictures of wild grass and wild flowers, but he could find nothing that caught his attention.

He put the book on the table and took from his pocket a letter—an old letter cramped and dirty, the one that Dr. Murt had written urging him to spend the fall and winter in Nebraska. Walter almost regretted that the invitation had been sent or accepted. In fact he was lonesome and homesick. His parents were in Europe, his two little sisters in a convent, and he, Walter, was out in a lonely house among the sand-hills of Nebraska.

When Dr. Murt was a medical student in Chicago he had boarded with Walter's parents. The Blakestones, though not wealthy, did not

take boarders; and it was by mere chance that young Murt, the medical student, had called at the residence with a friend, mentioned something about his looking for a rooming-house. Mrs. Blakestone was attracted by the young man before her. His regular, somewhat oval face was tanned. Innocence and simplicity were written upon his features. Though big-shouldered and manly there was a certain shyness and reserve in his words and actions.

Before she realized the offer which she made, Mrs. Blakestone had assured the stranger that he would be welcome as a member of the family.

No one had ever regretted that Frederic Murt had come to board with the Blakestones. During the four years of his medical course he remained with the family. He came and went, not as a stranger, but as a son. Not once did he abuse the privilege given him. He was like a big brother to the only boy of the family, Walter. They became inseparable companions. They went to church together, to confession on Saturday, and knelt side by side at the communion-railing on Sunday morning. They sat in the bleachers at ball-games, and took long walks together in the city parks.

Frederic Murt was a born hunter. When a mere child he hunted rabbits and quail and doves in the orchard and fields near the house. Then he became an expert at killing prairie chickens and jack-rabbits. Later on his chief sport was duck- and goose-hunting. When fall and winter came he chafed under the restraint of city life. How he longed to be back in Nebraska where ducks were cleaving the air and the wild geese were calling from on high.

So many incidents of hunting had Fred Murt rehearsed to Walter, at the home of the latter, that the boy had several times asked to accompany his older friend home during the summer vacation. The request was always refused, with the indefinite remark that some time later he might have an opportunity to make the visit.

Five months had now passed since Frederic Murt graduated with honor at the medical school in Chicago. He had recently married and was practising in his little native town—Sandpit. Time and distance had not separated the boy and the student, for they corresponded regularly, and the young physician had once visited the city and called on his friends.

Then an occasion arose which brought to Walter Blakestone the coveted visit to Nebraska. His parents had long wished to visit the aged parents of Mrs. Blakestone, who were still living in Ireland. It was arranged for the two girls to go to a convent for the year, and Walter to boarding-school. But the boy pleaded to spend the year with his former friend in Nebraska. After an interchange of letters Dr. Murt had offered to teach the boy the matter of the second year of high school, and guaranteed that he would be able to go into the third year when the parents returned, or if they came back by the first of February, Walter could go into the second year.

Dr. Murt was familiar with the course of studies and assured the parents that he would keep his word about the teaching. In fact, he was so grateful for all that had been done for him during his four years of study that he was only too glad to get this chance to return in some slight way the many favors bestowed upon him.

The parents, who trusted the young physician, finally yielded to the entreaties of their son. Walter had spent six weeks with an aunt before going to Nebraska. It was now the latter part of October. The boy's parents

were in Europe, his two sisters in the convent, and he was sitting at a little table in a lonely room in a quiet town of central Nebraska.

The boy was tired after the day's hunt and felt lonely. He was reading the last letter which Dr. Murt had written to him just before he left the city. He grew more lonely as he read; big tears gathered in his eyes until finally he rested his head upon his arm, leaned over on the table and sobbed.

The door was quietly opened and, unobserved, Mrs. Murt came into the room. She was surprised and grieved to see the boy crying. Knowing in her prudence that it was best not to disturb the little visitor, she quietly slipped from the room.

A few minutes later Walter was disturbed by the telephone and caught snatches of the conversation. Evidently Dr. Murt was talking with Dobbs.

"Yes—this is Dr. Murt . . ."

"Yes, yes . . ."

"Well, what's the trouble . . ."

"Oh, little Rolly's sick . . ."

"That's too bad . . ."

"And it won't be safe to wait . . ."

"Of course I'll do you a favor . . ."

"Yes, yes, I'll do you a favor. I'll come right now. Good-by!"

A few seconds later the doctor came blustering into the room. He fully intended to exaggerate matters and joke with his young visitor. But he suddenly turned and bent over him. "You've been crying, Walter. Sick? Tired after the hunt?"

"No," whimpered the lad.

"Homesick, perhaps?"

"Y-e-s," said the boy, unable to check the tears.

"Don't mind that. The first year I was in Chicago studying medicine I used to cry every night. I was then almost a grown man. It's a good sign to get homesick; but it will all pass away soon. Come, come on and ride with me to old Dobbs."

The boy stood up, but hung his head in shame, trying in vain to stifle the tears. "I don't want to go there," he muttered.

"He's forgotten all about the shooting—never referred to it."

"What does he want us for, then?"

"He didn't ask for you at all; I only thought that you would enjoy the ride. It is such a brisk, clear night."

"And he didn't say anything about me?"

"No! no! It is a sick-call. His little son is not well. He has urged me to come right away, and would take no excuse. Come on with me. You can sit in the machine, for I shall be in the house only a few minutes. Come on! The ride will do you good."

"I don't think I can stay here all the year," said the boy as he took his place in the machine.

"Your parents will probably be back in January and you can go home then."

"I didn't know I'd get this way," acknowledged the lad.

"I think the more of you for it," were the assuring words of the physician.

"Could I go back to Chicago and stay with my aunt?"

"Certainly, but remember that she has a large family. Try it for a week or so. In a few days we'll camp out on the Loup river and hunt ducks. After that you can write to your aunt and ask to stay with her. That is, if you insist on it. But you mustn't spoil my camping. I have been planning for it for weeks and waiting for you to come. You'll do that for me, won't you?"

"I'll do anything for you, doctor—if I could only stop crying—I didn't know I was such a baby."

"No, you are not a baby. Don't be ashamed. You are going through an experience that many of us have faced."

All the while the automobile was speeding along the road toward the house of Isidore Dobbs.

The farmer was at the gate waiting to receive the physician. "It's serious, very serious," he whispered as Dr. Murt alighted from the automobile.

"Let us hope not," was the answer. The two walked slowly into the house, leaving the boy in the machine.

"Are you very sick, my little fellow?" were the words of Dr. Murt as he stood at the bedside of his patient.

"I want Ig," whimpered little Rolly.

"What do you want?"

"I want Ig."

"I can't understand him," replied the physician, turning to the farmer.

"Oh, that cussed Indian—Ig we called him. I sent him away yesterday."

"I want Ig—I want Ig," broke in the lad. The boy was moaning and moaning and all the while in half-stifled words he repeated: "I want Ig. I want Ig."

"He has no fever," reported the doctor after

an examination. "His heart and pulse are just a trifle above normal, but this comes from excitement and crying."

"He cried all night and all this blessed day," affirmed the farmer.

After a thorough examination of the patient the physician asked, "What did he have for supper?"

"He wouldn't eat," replied the father. Dr. Murt motioned to the man to follow, and the two took a seat at the end of the room. "Mr. Dobbs," began the physician, "I can save your son, for he is not dangerously ill, but I want you to promise to follow my advice."

"Anything, anything you say," and the farmer grasped the hand of the physician.

"In the first place, Mr. Dobbs, this boy is suffering from malnutrition. He has not been getting sufficient nourishment. In other words, he hasn't had enough to eat. From what you tell me of the Indian trying to work on the farm and do the cooking and judging from the scanty supplies in the house, the boy has been neglected. Yesterday there was a young Belgian and his wife in Sandpit looking for a place to settle. Bring the couple here, give them a part of the house, and let the wife do the cooking. Then let the boy go to

school. Let him have companionship like other boys. Invite the neighboring children to your house and encourage him to visit them. It's this unnatural life that you are forcing your child to lead, together with insufficient food, that has made the child sick. The Indian's leaving hurried the matter, but the trouble would have come sooner or later. It is probably better that it came just at this time. With companionship and care the boy will soon be well. I am sorry that you sent the Indian away; but it is too late, for I know him well and I feel sure that he will not return. With the Belgian people you will not need him."

"I will follow your advice," was the meek reply.

"I have something else to suggest, but I will tell you later."

"Anything, anything," said the man.

Again the doctor approached the bed. "Ig can not come to-night, my boy," he whispered. "Now go to sleep like a nice little fellow and to-morrow I'll have something good for you."

Rolly had ceased to moan and was resting quietly. Soon he fell into a natural sleep.

"He will probably sleep soundly the entire night," explained the physician as he took his

hat. "I am sure there is no danger. I will be back early to-morrow. If you follow my advice, Mr. Dobbs, there will be no danger."

"I certainly will," said the farmer.

"Good night!"

"Good night, and thank you—thank you!"

CHAPTER VI

GETTING AT THE DIFFICULTY

"SLEEPY?" asked Dr. Murt, as he stepped into the car.

"I was dreaming about those prairie chickens," yawned Walter.

"I have found a friend for you," continued the physician. "The finest little fellow in the State. All he needs is some one to play with. I am going to bring you back with me to-morrow. How would you like to stay a day or so with Rollin Dobbs?"

"You said his father was the meanest man in Nebraska," remarked the boy.

"So I did, but he has changed. He has changed since I left you and went into the house. He has promised to follow my advice in regard to the boy, to let him go to school and be like other boys. I am going to get a young Belgian and his wife to come out here and keep house for old Dobbs, and I want you to be a friend of little Rolly. Then you can

hunt ducks right in the barn. You can put the decoys in a place where you can shoot from the wagon-shed near the barn."

"That will be swell," said the boy.

Before they reached the home of Dr. Murt, Walter was not only willing to spend a day with young Rolly, but was anxious to make the experiment. That very night the doctor found the Belgian, Mr. Rudolph Seyon, and his wife and made the offer in regard to the Dobbs household. As the newly-married couple were without means they agreed to the offer, and were only too glad to be able to settle down so soon. While the final terms could not be arranged definitely that night, Dr. Murt assured them that he was practically authorized to secure their help. At the grocery he ordered a supply of provisions to be delivered at his house early on the following morning. The same was done with the butcher. Dr. Murt went security for the payment, but had the bills made out to farmer Dobbs.

Early on the following morning the Seyons and Walter, accompanied by Bob, were in the doctor's car spinning over the sand-hills toward the farm of Isidore Dobbs.

"You are to act just as if you owned the house," were the words of explanation to Mrs.

Seyon. "As soon as we reach the house go right into the kitchen and cook the steak for the sick boy, warm the bread and make some coffee. Remember that you are to ask Mr. Dobbs for nothing. I am running the house to-day. When I leave be sure to take care of the boy; be sure to get him sufficient to eat. That's all he needs, unless I misjudged his case last night. And Rudolph, you go out to the barn and see about the stock. Take care of things just as if they belonged to you. I am going to remain all day. In case of doubt ask me. Now remember, ask me."

Isidore Dobbs was not only surprised, but astonished. As soon as the automobile drew up in front of the house the physician and his three companions alighted and went into the dwelling. Bob, who had been brought along, was left tied in the car. No attention was paid to the farmer; he was treated as if he were only a guest in the house. Dr. Murt had taken him at his word and had assumed complete charge of the household.

Rollin was awakened from a deep sleep, a sleep that had not been interrupted during the entire night. He muttered a few words about Ig, but was assured that his Indian friend would be gone for a while, and that in the

meantime a little companion had come to play with him.

To the utter amazement of his father, little Rolly was soon playing with some tops and marbles with which Dr. Murt had thoughtfully provided Walter. And best of all, Rolly was not sick; but he was hungry, very hungry.

Before an hour had passed the Belgian woman announced breakfast. And what a breakfast! Beefsteak and buns, coffee and butter and honey. There was no salt in the house and the visitors had not brought cream, as they thought that milk at least would be found on the farm. Still no one could complain. Isidore Dobbs was invited to come to breakfast as if he were a stranger. He obeyed without a word, and took his place beside Rolly. Opposite sat the doctor and Walter. Soon the Belgian came in and announced that he had fed the stock; then he, too, sat down at the table.

Dr. Murt did not allow his plans to be interrupted for a moment. Farmer Dobbs had given him his permission to do anything he wished for the good of the boy. The doctor knew that success depended on his taking complete charge of the household. He did not in-

tend to give the farmer even a chance to object to anything. Dobbs was told just what rooms in the rear of the building were to be assigned to the Belgian family, what work the wife and husband were to do, and what pay they were to receive. Rollin was to go to school and Mr. Dobbs was to do only some slight work around the house.

Later on Dr. Murt intended to get at the bottom of the farmer's financial difficulties, but he felt that he had gone far enough that day in using his arbitrary powers.

The boys had scarcely finished eating when Dr. Murt jumped from his chair and began:

"Come on, let us go duck-hunting. I will arrange the decoys and you two can watch for ducks from the barn. Walter, you can run up here and let me know if ducks light and I will slip down with my gun."

"Are you mad, doctor?" asked Mr. Dobbs, startled by the announcement.

"Mad? Not yet, I hope!"

"But that boy is sick and you are sending him out into the damp."

"He needs the fresh air," replied the physician. "Remember, now, that I am handling the case. I will wrap him up well and carry him down to the barn."

"Well, you are handling the case, but don't kill the boy by foolishness!"

"The boy isn't sick," insisted Dr. Murt. "I had some doubts about his case last night, but the doubts have passed. All that little Rollin needs is fresh air, sufficient to eat, and boys to play with. What do you think?" asked the doctor turning to the boy at his side.

"I was hungry."

"But are you sick?" the doctor wanted to know.

"Soon's Ig comes back I'll be well."

"He may be gone some time, but Walter here can play with you."

"Yes, yes," broke in Walter, "we'll be the best of friends, and I like to be in the big barn waiting for the ducks."

"Well, well," said the farmer, "it is all with the doctor. If he wants Rolly to watch for the ducks, I don't object."

Rollin soon forgot about Ig. He was wrapped in a heavy blanket and carried by Dr. Murt to the barn, then the physician left the boys and drove around the lake to get the decoy ducks.

Walter was shown a machine used for winnowing grass-seed and was asked to play "thrashing." Playing "thrashing" consisted

in turning the fan in this machine. It did not exactly appeal to the visitor, especially since he understood that he was to do the turning; but he had come to be a companion to Rollin, so he entered with spirit into the new sport, and began to turn the rather heavy fan.

"You blow the whistle first," explained Rollin.

"Where is the whistle?"

"There ain't any; you just whistle yourself like Ig done."

"Then I'll whistle and start the thrashing-wheels."

"They ain't wheels," remonstrated Rollin, "they're a thrashing-machine."

"Then I'll turn the thrashing-machine," were the words of the accommodating youth.

"But you didn't put any oil on the wheels like Ig done."

"Where is the oil?"

"You just take a stick like this," and Rollin with a piece of wood poured the imaginary oil on the mechanism, for this was Ig's way of doing it.

"Is it ready now?" Walter wanted to know.

"You have to get up steam," replied Rollin. "You go just like this: 'Shu-shu-u-u-u-u-u-' like Ig done."

"All right, we'll get up steam," and Walter imitated his instructor: "Shu-shu-u-u-u-u-u-u-"

Everything seemed ready. Walter with a "Shu-shu-u-u-u-u-u-u-" and a whistle began turning the wheels on the winnowing-machine. Rollin meanwhile fed the imaginary thresher with imaginary straw, and gathered up imaginary bags of wheat.

In a short time Walter was completely exhausted and lay down upon the barn floor to rest.

Dr. Murt soon returned with the announcement that he had already placed the decoys, and that the boys were to watch and give warning if a flock of ducks dropped into the lake.

"Here is a crack in the side, through which you have a fine view," said he, after examining the boards in the barn. "Take your turn watching and if any ducks light Walter can run up to the house and let me know."

"Can we play thrashing-machine?" asked Rollin.

"No, let us play watching ducks," protested Walter, for he failed to see any fun in the monotonous work of turning the wheels of the winnowing-machine.

Rollin at once assented, and the two began

the watch, while the doctor went to the car, got Bob and the gun, and then returned to the house to have a further interview with the farmer.

Dr. Murt was determined to learn the truth about the financial standing of Mr. Dobbs, and felt that it would be best to get right at the matter without any parley or introduction. He found the farmer still sitting at the breakfast-table.

"Mr. Dobbs," he began, "I have come here to-day not only to look after the health of the boy but to help you. Pardon me, but I know that you are in trouble. The people around speak of your wealth, your gold—the gold that you are hiding around the house. I don't believe a word of it. You are not well; you are worrying and I am convinced that you are in financial trouble. I believe that you have lost money."

The farmer was slow to talk about his private affairs; but the physician had won his confidence and esteem. Gradually he told the story of his troubles—his speculation in some mines in Montana, the loss of his investments, and more speculations to make up for losses. Finally he concluded by acknowledging that his farm was mortgaged and that he had not

sufficient to pay for the breakfast which the doctor had provided.

For two hours they talked the matter over and finally agreed to let the Belgian family rent the farm. Mr. Dobbs was to remain there until things could be definitely arranged.

The conversation was interrupted by Walter, who ran up, all out of breath, and announced that a big flock of ducks was among the decoys.

Seizing his gun, the doctor rushed off to the barn, with Bob at his heels. "Ha, ha!" he laughed as he gazed through the hole in the side of the barn. "Tame ducks from the neighbors'! Not wild ducks at all!"

"Walter said they was wild," put in Rollin.

"So did you," asserted Walter.

"Just a moment," whispered the doctor. "There is a flock of wild ducks just lighting among the decoys—a big flock, too! Just keep quiet here, boys, and I'll try to get up on them."

From their hiding-place in the barn the two boys watched Dr. Murt creeping toward the lake followed by Bob. He managed to keep behind a row of corn shocks until he was quite close to the coveted prizes. As they were swimming among the tame ducks, he had to

flush them before shooting. Leaping to his feet, he dashed toward the flock. With a splash and a flutter the ducks were in the air. The first shot brought down three, and at each of the five shots that followed, a single duck fell into the water.

Soon Bob was out in the water frightening away the tame ducks and bringing in those which had been killed. Later two happy boys entered the house, Walter carrying a duck in each hand and Rollin bearing upon his shoulder a big drake, while the doctor brought up the rear with the five remaining birds.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE BANKS OF THE LITTLE LOUP

At the request of Dr. Murt, Walter spent the three following days with Rollin. The latter regained his strength under the care of Mrs. Seyon, and became so interested in the company of his little friend that he entirely forgot the Indian, Ignatius.

In the meanwhile Dr. Murt came daily to the house and held long conferences with Mr. Dobbs, whose property he was endeavoring to save. The Ingram Real Estate Company of Omaha informed the physician that some one was negotiating to take up the mortgage, but would not give the name. In the meanwhile Dr. Murt advanced a few dollars to the farmer and at the same time assured him that he would do all in his power to assist him.

It was now the early part of November and the ducks were just beginning to fly south. Dr. Murt always hunted with one companion, and this year the companion was to be Walter

Blakestone. About thirty miles from Sandpit, on the banks of the little Loup River, was a hunting lodge owned by some business men of Omaha. As the owners were to camp there at the close of November, Dr. Murt had arranged to use the lodge at the beginning of the month.

Walter bade good-by to Rollin, promising to return after a few days. On the following morning the physician and his boy friend, together with the indispensable Bob, were speeding over the sand-hills toward the banks of the Loup with plenty of provisions for a six-day trip. The whole conversation was about the troubles at the Dobbs home.

"Has little Rollin been sick any of these days?" asked the physician.

"Indeed he has, Dr. Murt."

"How?"

"It's just this way. He don't seem to have any breath. When he plays thrashing-machine and turns the handle for a short time why he can't breathe. He lies on the floor and nearly dies."

"I have to examine into that as soon as I return," said the physician.

"Then," continued the boy, "when we ran over to catch a muskrat before it reached its

hole he was so out of breath I had to carry him back."

"That is bad. There must be something the matter with his heart," mused the physician gravely.

"He told me, too, they didn't have much to eat since his mother died," said Walter. "Sometimes Ig made soup out of horse corn—just ordinary horse corn, boiled all day and softened. For a while they lived on some chickens, but Mr. Dobbs sold all the chickens. Then he sold the cows and there wasn't any milk to drink."

"So I heard, so I heard!" repeated the physician. "Just as soon as I get back I must look into all these matters."

"I want to spend a week with him and trap muskrats," asserted Walter. "We can sell the skins and I'll give the money to Rollin."

"How would you like to trap wolves?" asked the man.

"Gee, but that would be fun!" asserted the boy. "But how far would we have to go?"

"Just where you are going. There have always been wolves along the Loup River. And for coyotes, you may hear them to-night."

"What is a coyote, Dr. Murt?"

"Well, it is something like a dog and a wolf.

It must be a small wolf. It is the meanest, slyest animal in all the West. It will sneak around the houses any night and carry off a young lamb or pig. But there is something for you to see," said the physician pointing toward a number of mounds along the hillside. "That is a prairie-dog colony."

"I read about them in Washington Irving," replied the boy.

"And what did he say?"

"Let me see. Now I recollect, he said that the prairie dogs had strange companions, that dogs and owls and snakes lived in the same hole."

"There are two of the owls," and the doctor pointed toward the birds sailing over the colony.

"Did you ever see the snakes?" asked the boy.

"No, but there is a colony of dogs not far from the Dobbs farm; you and Rollin can investigate for yourselves."

"How far is it?" asked Walter.

"Oh, about three miles."

"Rollin can't walk that far, he's too weak," affirmed Walter.

After speeding on for some miles, Dr. Murt brought his car to a stop. "Look over to your

right," said he. "See that cluster of bushes almost perfectly round? That's a hackberry pocket. In the middle you will notice a depression made by the great blue herons, which nest there in the spring and summer. We'll take a walk over there. Sometimes the birds return to their nesting-place in the fall. Mr. Pole, the curator of the State Museum at Lincoln, has always been kind to me and very generous in sending me books and information. He is anxious to get a few more specimens of the heron. We'll take our chances on finding one."

"Must I bring my gun?" asked the boy.

"Yes, certainly, but tie Bob. We don't need him with us now. We may possibly run into the family. Just blaze away at the colony." They had gone but a few feet from the road when the doctor paused and said: "No use! There they go. Good-by, Mr. Heron, good-by!"

Walter looked up and saw three graceful figures with outstretched necks sailing over the hills.

"It seems impossible to get up on them," remarked the man, turning back toward the car. "They are on the lookout all the time. I could kill them during the nesting season, but

then it is so hard to preserve the specimens. But we may get a shot later."

Just as he spoke a prairie chicken rose before him. He fired and the bird fell. "Couldn't miss such a shot," he laughed. "It will come in fine for lunch."

It was noon when the lodge was reached. The two hunters alighted from the car, untied Bob, and the three made their way toward the building.

"What do you think of our house?" asked Dr. Murt, as he removed the padlock and swung open the rustic door.

"It looks warm," replied the boy.

"Yes, we may need a warm place before the six days are passed; and later if we come to hunt wolves we may strike zero weather."

The lodge stood in the midst of a narrow woods of yellow pine, with clusters of cedar and green ash. It was a pleasant change from the treeless country over which they had driven. The hut was of rough timber with a tin roof and huge fireplace, which served both for cooking and heating. There were sleeping-cots for four and a large canoe. Cooking utensils were soon carried into the lodge and a hasty meal was enjoyed.

"Now for the decoys and the blind and the

ducks," said Dr. Murt as he led the way toward the river. "You will notice," he continued, "that the river makes a big bend here and forms a marsh fully half a mile in width. It is full of wild rice. Just an ideal place for ducks. Of course we take our chances this time of the year. We are about three weeks too early for the best sport; but later on there are so many hunters that there is no fun. In fact, it is dangerous and every year one or more are shot. It isn't often that any one is killed; but I don't like the prospects of carrying around duck-shot under my skin or losing an eye. Now let us take a look at the lake and the rice-banks before we settle on a place for the blind."

"What is the wild rice like?" asked the boy.

"It has a long head with a beard something like rye. In the beginning of the season the ducks eat the heads, which float along the surface. Later they dive for the kernels that have sunk to the bottom."

Standing on the bank the hunters looked out over the sluggish stream. In many places water-lilies and cattails were so thick that the surface was entirely obscured. It did not take Dr. Murt long to decide. His experienced eye caught sight of a dense clump of cattails

rising fully five feet above the water. Near by were many clusters of rice, while the absence of any growth a few feet away showed that the stream suddenly deepened.

"There is the place," he said. "We can build our blind among those cattails."

"How can we row through them?" asked the boy.

"They seem to be thick," answered the man, "but it isn't hard to push the canoe in among them. First we must cut four long poles to drive down into the bottom of the river. I was fooled once in the length of the poles. After cutting them I found that the river was deeper than I had thought, so all my work was for nothing. Let us get the canoe and find out how deep the water is."

It was pleasant sport guiding the frail canoe out among the river growth. The water was only three feet deep, so that an eight-foot pole was sufficient. Returning to shore Dr. Murt cut the poles and sharpened the lower ends. Then loading them in the canoe he rowed out to the place which he had selected. It required three trips to bring out sufficient pine-branches to complete the blind.

"A perfect piece of work," cried the doctor with enthusiasm as he tied the last pine-branch

on a pole. "Mr. Duck will fly right over us and never know we are here. Now we'll go and get the decoys. Then we'll take a good meal and then—then—the hunting season is on! Good old hunting time!—old hunting time!"

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE DUCK-BLIND

With Dr. Murt no hunting expedition was a failure. He enjoyed every hour and every detail of the work. He was an experienced cook, too, and took real pleasure in preparing his own meals. If he bagged his game he was pleased; but even when he returned home without a shot he seemed equally satisfied.

"You must learn to dress and cook your game," he remarked to Walter as he picked up the prairie-chicken which he had killed on the way, and began to pluck its feathers. "Half the fun is in doing your own work. That's the reason I never care to hunt with those fellows from the city. They must bring their cook with them and have all the things which they are accustomed to at home. If I am looking for my regular meals I stay at home and get them. This chicken would be a little better if we could hang it out for the night; but I

hope by that time to have a few ducks, so we'll eat the bird now."

In the meanwhile Walter was collecting some dry wood. It was decided to cook out in the open as the weather was mild.

"Must I get the frying pan?" asked the boy.

"There you are," mildly remonstrated the man. "Want things just as they are in the city. You aren't in Chicago or at home. No, sir, Mr. Hunter, this chicken is to be broiled. We'll take a forked stick, and each cook his half. Do you hear? If you don't learn to cook on this expedition you won't eat. No cook—no eat! We have the same laws here that Captain Smith had at Jamestown. Do you remember what the Captain did?"

"He married an Indian to do his cooking."

"That's one on me," laughed the doctor. "I believe he did marry; but he made a law that if any one of the party didn't work he couldn't eat. Now that's the law of this party. If you can't cook your part of this prairie-chicken you won't have any meat for your—your—well—your afternoon lunch. It is too late to call this dinner and too early for supper. We'll take a light supper after dark."

Following the direction of his teacher the boy had little difficulty in broiling the chicken

over the burning coals. He acknowledged, too, that it had an inviting flavor which was wanting in meat cooked in an oven.

Before they had finished with their refreshments it was well on in the afternoon, and a haze had begun to settle down on the river.

"Just ideal weather for them," said the doctor, "just ideal for a duck-hunt. Come, let us row across to our hiding-place among the cat-tails. But I forgot something—and a very important thing, too. Would you care about taking a swim?"

"Not this afternoon; but why do you ask me?"

"To avoid giving you a swim against your will."

"How is that?" the boy wanted to know.

"Very simple. Try to shoot ducks from that canoe and you are just as apt to tumble into the water as you are to hit your mark. If I were alone and it were summer-time I might take my chances; but I don't relish a dip this time of the year, especially when I have no change of clothes with me. We have got to get four stakes and put one each side of the boat."

"Why not use the oars?" asked the boy.

"They may not be long enough, besides it

gets them so muddy and wet that it makes disagreeable rowing.

"That is much better than an oar," remarked the doctor as he reached out toward a sapling. "It is two feet longer and has more bend in it. If we break one, nothing is lost. Then," he continued, taking something from his pocket, "I have these four snaphooks which fit into the oar-locks. They must be fastened to the poles and yet we must be able to release the canoe immediately after shooting, for frequently a wounded duck will get away if not followed at once."

"Can't Bob get them?"

"Yes, if the weeds are not too thick. It is easy for a dog to drown among the thick cat-tails. It is only by experience that one learns these things. That is the reason those city fellows are such poor hunters. They practise with traps and become excellent shots, but when the real hunting begins they frighten the ducks, upset canoes, and frequently kill some one and even shoot themselves. I have seen enough of it. You couldn't pay me to be here at the end of the month when the hunting season is wide open. Besides, I can kill more ducks than six of these hunters. I am not boasting, young fellow, but telling you the

simple truth. I am not a better shot than some of those city fellows; but I know all the tricks. Time and again I have brought down six or even eight ducks in six shots from my automatic. It is very seldom that a bunch of five hunters will get over five ducks."

"How do they miss them, if they know how to shoot?" asked the boy.

"It does seem strange that they should do so."

"Have they got automatic guns?"

"The finest made—just like yours and mine."

"I believe that I could kill at least one in five shots."

"Probably two, and if you hunt with me for a short time you will surprise yourself."

The canoe was now drawing near the blind. Into the hiding place it glided, where it was made fast with the four poles and snaphooks. Shells were pushed into the automatics, each hunter took his place, while Bob crouched in the bottom of the canoe.

It was not necessary to keep a close lookout for the ducks, which invariably circled around several times before dropping into the water. These few minutes when the flock is settling give the hunter his most thrilling experience.

Usually a flock will pass over the decoys as if unaware of their presence. An uninitiated hunter will invariably imagine that the ducks failed to see the decoys or have been frightened away. What signals nature has taught them to exchange no one knows; but suddenly they will reel in a solid phalanx and return in the direction of their mimic companions, passing lower and closer but going far beyond them. Again and again they come and go, each time drawing closer and flying lower. Then with a cry they dip into the water. They do not seem to be frightened by the decoys once they have lit in their midst; but will remain for hours swimming about in the quiet company of their lifeless associates.

It was with a thrill of joy, then, that Dr. Murt observed a flock sailing high overhead and disappear in the distance.

"See, see!" he whispered to the boy.

"But they have gone," was the faint reply.

"Just watch and see—I think they are coming—yes, yes, there they are again. They will probably fly back over us again. They seldom light until they have made a close examination of the lake."

"Do you think they will suspect us?" asked Walter.

"They are always on the alert; danger has taught them to be ever on the watch."

"Can they see us, Dr. Murt?"

"I hope not, for if they do, it's good-by ducks."

In the quiet that followed the beating of wings could be distinctly heard overhead.

"A large flock," said Dr. Murt in an undertone, "a very large flock."

The whir of wings became still louder as the birds flew in a smaller circle and drew closer and closer.

Dr. Murt moved slightly to get a better position and Walter felt his heart throbbing and beating.

Suddenly there was a wild cry of alarm overhead. The entire flock screamed and beat the air with their speeding wings. Away and away they sailed, leaving the hunters gazing at them in bitter disappointment.

Dr. Murt examined the covering of the blind. It seemed perfect.

"You frightened them," he said turning to Walter. "When did you take that coat off?"

"Just a few minutes ago; it was so warm."

"Yes, and the ducks saw your white shirt. It is strange that I didn't notice you. Well, you'll know better next time. That's a good

joke on the city boy taking his first lesson in duck-hunting. Didn't I tell you that those city people always made some mistake. In fact, one must be at this business regularly before he gets all the fine points. So, don't worry; it wasn't your fault—but—l-o-o-k," he stammered, "bless my heart if they're not coming back. Hurry and slip on that coat."

Sure enough, far in the distance the entire flock could be seen flying back toward the decoys. Time and again they came and went, drawing closer and closer with each circle.

"We've got 'em," whispered the doctor. "Now fire just as they are ready to dip. Wait until they are a foot from the water."

It seemed an hour while Walter held his gun in his trembling hands.

They were circling right over the decoys. Then wings were beating the air and Walter's heart was beating in unison. They were six feet above the water—then four,—then two.

A fusillade went out from the two guns; and all was quiet only after the magazines were emptied.

"We've got six or eight," cried Dr. Murt. "You can claim half."

"I believe that my last shot did bring down one," replied the excited boy.

"Yes, that was yours that fell over among the cattails. Unsnap your end of the boat, and let us pull out to keep the wounded ones from swimming away and hiding."

As soon as the canoe emerged from the weeds and other growth Bob leaped out into the water. He did not touch those lying dead but started at once to overtake the two wounded. It was no easy matter, for although their wings were broken they could swim and dive with speed. "I'll end that old fellow," said the doctor inserting a shell in his gun. As he fired one of the wounded ducks dropped over. By this time Bob had caught the other one and had broken its neck by a sudden jerk. Then the dog brought in the prizes one by one.

"Just eight," said the doctor, "and the one over in the cattails makes nine, and I believe that I saw another fall over there," he continued, pointing to a thick cluster of water growth. He was right, for two more were found, making a total of ten.

"That will do for the night," affirmed Dr. Murt. "It is not probable that another flock will come by, for it is getting too late. Besides, ten should be enough for one afternoon."

CHAPTER IX

A CHANGE IN THE SPORT

"I HAVE an explanation about those ducks," said the doctor. "They didn't see your white shirt. It was a family fight. Ducks and geese elect an officer when they start south. As geese haven't any sense, they follow the leader if it is wrong. But when some smart ducks see that the leader is wrong they rebel—just simply refuse to go with the fellow that doesn't know its business. So there was trouble up in that flock this afternoon. Some wanted to stop with our decoys and camp for the night; the leader insisted on going farther and camping farther south. It was just a matter of opinion. Many at first followed the leader; but after going some distance they changed their minds and returned to camp, and made the leader come with them, ha! ha! ha! Unfortunately we were there to greet them."

Dr. Murt was in a talkative mood. He and Walter had just finished supper and were sitting on the rustic benches in the lodge in front

of a blazing fire, and as the doctor watched the smoke curl from his corncob pipe he unfolded his theory about leadership among ducks.

"Well," replied Walter, "the leader was right after all."

"Yes, it was right from the point of view of the ducks; but if it had had its way we'd be here complaining of bad luck."

"I am glad that there was a division of opinion in the family," said the boy.

"Yes, this theory of mine saves your reputation as a hunter; if those ducks had not returned I would always have held you responsible for our failure."

"I hope the poor leader wasn't killed," affirmed the boy.

"Why?"

"Because he tried to do his duty and save his flock, that's the reason. I wish him good luck."

"Well, boy, don't get soft hearted over my speculations," said Dr. Murt, blowing rings from his pipe. "I may be wrong. Ducks may be just as foolish as geese, and possibly more so. In fact, thinking it over, they are more foolish—absolutely more foolish. Why, you can decoy ducks any time. Just drop a piece of wood into the water and fasten some

kind of head on to it and ducks will come up and make love to it. Did you ever see a flock of geese down in the midst of decoys? Never. If you want to kill a goose you must lie on your back all day in a corn-field; or by chance you may stumble across them feeding, but there is no use going after them. One never knows where to find them. So thinking it over —quietly—solemnly—seriously—thinking it over, I retract what I said about the geese. Geese are smart, quick, and sensible. Ducks are stupid, slow, and—well, I can't find another word; but what I've said will express my opinion about ducks."

Dr. Murt was thoroughly enjoying this half soliloquy and half oration while the boy listened and wondered whether the doctor was talking seriously.

"I hear some noise outside," remarked Walter in the lull of conversation.

"And you'll be hearing ghosts all night—just like you fellows from the city! It's only the wind—no ghost about it! In fact I noticed it coming up shortly after we reached camp. I'm afraid that we may not be able to go out on the river to-morrow. It is simply wonderful how rough the water can get some-

times. I've seen it when the canoe couldn't live five seconds. Luckily we got enough meat for a week."

"Hello! Is Dr. Murt here?" Unnoticed a man walked into the cabin.

"Right here, sir," and jumping to his feet the doctor grasped the hand of Hodge Billows, a ranchman who lived three miles away. I promised my wife to 'phone her to-morrow night from your house. Shake hands with my companion, Walter Blakestone."

"Glad to see you, boy! Glad to see you!"

"I have come out again for a little sport before the army of hunters arrives, and have brought my young friend along. He's from the city, so I have to teach him all the tricks of the hunter. Why, he nearly scared the whole flock away with his white shirt."

"You done right well; I see you got four ducks."

"Four! more than twice that number. Didn't you see ten hanging on the line?" asked the doctor.

"I seen four hanging against that pine-tree."

"You are losing your sight, Mr. Billows; you should have your eyes examined. Go out there again and look along the line and you'll

see ten ducks. I want you to understand that when Dr. Murt shoots at a flock, more than four always fall."

"They may have fallen," put in the visitor, "but they ain't there now. I looked over the string."

"Somebody stole them," affirmed Walter. "I heard some one, and you said it was the wind. Don't you remember, doctor?"

"Stole—who is here to steal? Those ducks were there ten minutes ago," and the doctor walked out to make an investigation. "If I didn't know you were an honest man, Mr. Billows, I'd accuse you of the theft," said he with a laugh. "But there is no doubt about it, the string is broken and only four ducks are left."

"I know who's got 'em," broke in the farmer. "As sure as shooting, I know! It's a wolf. It's been just playing the devil around here the last two weeks. It's been stealing young pigs and lambs and geese and just everything. It comes right up to the house in the middle of the day. Some children seen it on their way from school."

"Why, Mr. Billows, the light of our fire would have frightened it. No wolf would come up here within ten feet of a fire."

"That depends," explained the farmer. "If

there are young wolves to be fed and food is scarce a wolf will walk into your kitchen while you are cooking. That was a wolf. It grabbed for the lowest duck on the string. The string broke and the wolf made away with six of the ducks. And come to think of it, I heard some rattling down there in them bushes as I come along."

At the suggestion of the farmer the party lighted a lantern and went out to search for traces of the missing game.

"Right I am!" exclaimed the farmer before he had gone fifty feet. "Right I am! Here are five of the ducks. The string got caught in a root and was broken again, and the thief made away with only one duck."

Close by where the soil was sandy there were evident tracks of a wolf. "Yes, sir, I am right! And here the thief has left his mark. Say, that one duck won't make a respectable supper for a wolf family. Just as sure as I'm Hodge Billows that wolf will come back again to-night."

"Well, if it does," spoke up the doctor, "if it does, it will stay here, for I'm going to wait for it if I have to sit here gun in hand all night."

"Its head is worth thirty dollars," explained

the farmer, "and if it's a coyote you get ten dollars."

"I think it's a wolf," explained the doctor, who had examined the tracks more carefully. "But wolf or coyote, I'm going to wait for it."

"It's been waiting for most everything in the neighborhood," replied the farmer. "I've been kinder scared of my cattle. And speaking of cattle, do you know any folks who'd like to buy some good ones? I had a chance to sell last month and am darned sorry I didn't do so. My hay ain't going to last—it just ain't going to do it. I see it now—sorry I didn't see it before."

"Why don't you advertise?"

"Well, sir, we folks has sold our cattle and things and there wasn't no putting it in the papers 'fore hand. People is been coming 'round and asking us to sell—always begging us and begging us."

"Yes, but it is rather late for the agents."

"I know it is, sir, but if you see any one or know any in town who wants some good cattle send 'em to see me, cause I just know that hay ain't going to last—it ain't going to last, no how."

"I shall try to remember it," said the physician.

On returning to the cabin, Hodge Billows left for home after wishing the hunters good luck. Walter did not relish the idea of sitting up all night waiting for a wolf. He closed the cabin door to keep Bob inside, rolled over on his hard cot and was soon fast asleep.

The doctor, who had brought along several charges of small buckshot for jack-rabbits, inserted them in his gun and went out to begin his watch. He had brought all the ducks to the cabin with the exception of one. This one he attached to the end of a string and took a position with the wind blowing from the path, along which the ducks had been dragged. In the darkness he could not see the thief if it approached but he held the string in his hand, and was ready to shoot if he felt a tug at the bait.

True, it was only a chance, but the doctor enjoyed taking the chance. He enjoyed sitting there in the darkness with the music of the wind overhead and the breaking of waves on the shore.

Suddenly without any warning there was a violent pull at the string. Instantly the automatic rang out with two shots. Before he realized what had happened a howling and wounded wolf leaped through the darkness

within a few feet of the hunter. Two more shots were fired, and the bleeding, snarling wolf lay before him. Dr. Murt dragged his prize back to the cabin.

On the following morning Walter was the first to awake. What was his surprise on opening the door of the cabin to see an enormous wolf hanging against a tree.

"Well, I got him," said the doctor, who had awakened and followed the boy out of the hut.

"A big one!" ejaculated the boy.

"It looks big hanging in that position," explained the doctor with satisfaction. "Still, it is not a small wolf. Several times I thought of giving up. I didn't think the thief would come back, and even if it did return I had only a chance in firing blindly in the dark, but I got it."

"I am sorry that I didn't sit up with you," replied the boy.

"You would have got the scare of your life, for when I fired the beast leaped almost to me. I believe that it made a spring at the duck from the other side. That is the way a wolf hunts. It creeps up on its victim and then makes a leap at it. I fired—fired without taking aim, guessed right, and happened to hit it. The beast kept on coming and fell right at my feet.

What would you have done if a maddened wolf dropped right before you? Possibly you might have been in my way."

"Well, I have seen a real wild wolf," said the boy as he examined the carcass.

"And I have had some real sport, and have made thirty dollars," put in the doctor. "I get thirty dollars from the State for the head, and can sell the skin."

Dr. Murt's predictions about the rough water came true. It was impossible to set the decoys that day.

As the doctor was tired after his long vigil he lay down to take a rest after breakfast. Walter went out over the hills to try his luck with prairie-chickens or a jack-rabbit. Although he kicked up several of the latter he killed but one. He was well pleased, however, when he returned at noon and laid the prize at the feet of the doctor.

That afternoon they put the decoys out in a little slough which was protected from the wind. Only a small duck—a teal—came along, and was brought down by the doctor.

After supper the physician drove in his machine to the ranch to tell his wife of his success. He got from her the message that Isidore

Dobbs was sick but the case was not dangerous or urgent.

He learned from Hodge Billows, too, that a large flock of geese had been feeding in a cornfield that afternoon, whereupon he resolved to try his luck with them on the following day.

CHAPTER X

THE MESSENGERS FROM THE NORTH

"I THINK we can be satisfied so far," remarked Dr. Murt as he and Walter were driving back to camp that night from Hodge Billows's ranch. "We have killed eleven ducks, a wolf, a chicken, a jack-rabbit, and now we must go after the geese. We'll have to be in the field early, for the birds begin to feed at daybreak."

"Are the geese hard to hit?" Walter wanted to know.

"Hard to hit, and harder to kill."

"Must I shoot in front of them?"

"If they are flying fast, yes, but if you get a shot when they are rising shoot right at them."

"Will we use decoys?"

"No, we'll simply hide in the corn-shocks and wait. If they light near us we are pretty sure to get one or two. If they drop down into the field some distance from our hiding-place it's all luck in getting a shot. Sometimes one can slip up on them, and again they

seem to have the whole field so guarded that it's impossible to get close."

"What do you mean by having the field guarded?"

"I mean that they have out sentinels or watchers. You will notice in every colony of prairie-dogs that one or two are always on the lookout. You can not get near them without being seen. The only difficulty with the prairie-dog is that it is too curious. When the danger signal is given the little fellows dive into their burrows and for a few minutes not a dog can be seen. But just stand still and you will see little heads peeping out of the holes, and soon the whole colony is in plain view. With geese it is different. When an alarm is given they are up at once, and fly away, never to return."

They soon reached the camp and retired immediately. In fact Walter, so he thought, had scarcely said a little prayer and closed his eyes when he felt something pulling at his toes.

"What's the matter?" he grunted.

"Nothing, but it's three o'clock and we must be out."

"Gee, have I been sleeping all night?"

"I suppose so; I know I slept until that alarm clock rang."

"And what time is it?"

"Three o'clock, but by the time we get breakfast and reach the corn-field it will be near daylight."

Walter was soon collecting some wood, while the doctor cooked, and completed the preparations for the day's sport, while Bob, feeling that something unusual was in the air, ran about, wagging his tail in anticipation. Breakfast over, they were soon in the machine, and before the first traces of day were visible, the two hunters and their dog were standing at the edge of the corn-field, looking over the place as best they could in the dim light.

"I think it is best for us to take positions far apart," explained the doctor, "for in that case we are more apt to get a shot. You walk over there and crawl in under a corn-shock. Keep well hid and listen—just listen. If any geese are near you will hear the 'Honk! Honk! Honk!' Like ducks they will circle around for a while before settling. If they drop near you let them begin to feed, and if they are close enough for a shot jump away from the hiding-place and rush at them. Don't shoot from the covering; you'll be too cramped to get a good shot. Sometimes when you rush right at them they get so confused that some

of the flock will fly right over you, and you can empty your magazine."

After listening to the instruction Walter climbed the fence and picked his way toward the corn-field, while Dr. Murt, followed by Bob, started off for a position half a mile away.

"Good luck," said the doctor.

"The same to you," came back the faint reply.

Only an experienced eye could have discerned the traces of awakening day. Reaching his natural blind of corn-stalks, Walter wrapped his heavy coat closely around him, slipped on his warm mittens, which Mrs. Murt had presented to him, and began his vigil.

As daylight gradually came he distinctly heard the call of geese overhead. Then he fell asleep and dreamed that thousands of the passenger birds had dropped down into the field around him. When he awoke all was bright and Dr. Murt was whispering into his ear: "It's dinner-time! You've missed the chance of your life."

"Missed what?" asked the boy, slowly realizing where he was.

"The chance of your life. You could have killed a hundred."

"Geese?"

"Yes, geese! You could actually have killed one with a club."

"Was it already wounded?"

"No; but it was feeding within a few feet of you."

"How do you know, doctor?"

"I have been watching them for an hour or more. I couldn't make out where you were hid; so I did not dare to fire myself, for fear of hitting you. When the flock got up I walked over here and to my surprise found you sleeping just where the birds had been feeding. But it is all in the sport, my boy, all in the sport," laughed the doctor. "We may get them yet," he added.

"Did they see me?" asked Walter.

"It is just possible that one old fellow put his head under the corn, and seeing you gave the alarm."

"How long have I been sleeping?" asked the boy, as he stretched his cramped limbs.

"About six hours; you see you were tired from yesterday, and didn't get much rest last night."

"And then this big coat was so nice and warm, and these mittens were so fine I dropped right off to sleep at once," assented the lad.

"Well, it isn't too late yet," continued the doctor. "It's the biggest flock I ever saw. At least it looked that way from a distance. Since there are so many it shows that the geese have not been shot at often; probably not at all. They are not easily frightened and will not fly far. They seemed to me, when they left this place, to drop down again less than half a mile away. But let us take a bite to eat."

While they enjoyed the short repast the doctor explained his next move. He would go around in a big circle and get on the other side of the geese, and would then endeavor to slip up within range. If he flushed them without getting a shot he might at least drive them toward Walter.

"Must I wait for them to settle if I see them coming?" asked the boy.

"Wait for nothing—bang right at them, and bang as long as you have a shell in the magazine."

"It's too bad that I went to sleep when I had a chance," said Walter.

"No, not at all—it only showed that you needed a sleep more than you needed the geese. It is all in the sport. No one can plan and have things go on just as he wishes. That is

half the fun in hunting. You make all your plans and then something happens. Yes, something happ-e-n-s—." The doctor paused. "Bless—my—heart—and—soul," he muttered, "they are coming—back! Yes—sir! Crawl under that corn! Here, Bob!"

It seemed but a minute before the "honk-honk" was plainly heard.

"Jump when I do! Set your magazine to empty itself. Ready now, ready," directed the doctor.

The flock was not twenty feet from the ground and was bearing down upon the hunters. It was a chance that one might wait for, and not get in years of sport. Never before had Dr. Murt seen so many geese so near overhead.

When he threw the corn-stalks aside and leaped into the open a great cry of consternation went up from the aerial army. With beating wings the geese swerved upward instead of turning to one side and in so doing they made a perfect target, as for a few seconds they poised in midair.

A volley rang out, and four geese dropped to the ground.

"Two more are wounded," cried the doctor. "Come on, Bob," and he started on a run, in

the meantime shoving more shells into his automatic. "Go back and wait," he called out to Walter, who had started off with him. "Watch the ones that have fallen."

Walter ran up to one which, though wounded in the wing, was running off to hide. As he seized the creature, with strong flaps of its wings it beat the boy's hands and arms until he was forced to release his hold, but it soon fell over, exhausted by the loss of blood.

Turning, Walter could see the doctor running on with Bob, while far overhead a single goose which was lagging behind the flock was gradually coming down. A shot from the man brought it to the ground.

"Ha-ha! Five geese! Well, boy, you might wait in this field for ten years and never get another chance like that!"

"I wonder whether I killed one?" asked the boy.

"Yes," replied the doctor, "you killed two."

"How do you know?"

"Well, our shot was really not large enough and I fired three times at the first goose I killed, and three at the second. You must have killed the other two, unless a stray shot from my gun got one of them. I don't know who wounded this last one," and the doctor

held it up for inspection. "I didn't take any risk," he explained. "I might have gotten more by firing at six different birds, but I wanted to be sure. I held my aim on one until I saw it falling, and then turned to the second."

"I don't know what I did," said the boy. "It was all over before I knew what had happened."

"Well, it was worth ten days' sport and ten days' waiting," put in the doctor.

With their trophies the two hunters were soon on their way back to camp. Stopping at the ranch of Hodge Billows, Dr. Murt presented the happy farmer with one of his prizes. He also learned by telephoning his wife that old Dobbs had asked for him several times. Still, there did not seem to be any urgent call.

The following three days at the camp were most enjoyable. Flocks of ducks settled around the blind, and always left one or more of their number behind them when they flew away. Although the hunters ate duck three times a day and gave half a dozen to Mr. Billows they had twenty-four hanging out in the cold when the State game warden came by on a tour of inspection. No hunter was allowed to have more than twelve ducks in his posses-

sion at a time. Dr. Murt was careful to give away or use all above this number.

Several blinds were being built along the river by prospective hunters. As the doctor knew that this was the signal for scores of inexperienced men to gather in from Omaha and the neighboring towns, and as he did not enjoy hunting under these conditions, he decided to break camp.

Those had been five glorious days, and for weeks and months Dr. Murt and his boy companion talked of the hunting-camp along the banks of the Loup River.

CHAPTER XI

THE INGRAM REAL ESTATE CO.

"PUTTY early, sir," said the office-boy, "de boss won't be in 'fore eight-thirty. But dis feller has to be down here at seven; gits up at six, hits a cold breakfast, 'cept coffee, and hikes down here on foot to save carfare."

As he talked the boy tossed the chairs around, while with a slip and a hit he dusted the desks and other pieces of furniture.

The visitor paid no attention either to the remarks or the actions of the boy, but seating himself at the end of the office looked out over the awakening life of the city.

Soon a second man entered the waiting-room of the real estate company.

"Jiminy crickets," mused the office-boy, "de boss is going to do a rushing business to-day—two guys here long 'fore business hours."

Presently the stenographer entered and began to clean the desk which the boy had just dusted.

Promptly at eight-thirty Theodore Ingram

walked across the waiting-room, bowed to the two men and passed into his private office. It was only a few minutes before the stenographer appeared and asked which of the two gentlemen was first.

"I can wait," said the one who had come first.

"No, you have the right," replied number two.

"You are near the door, go right on in. I can wait," asserted number one.

With a word of thanks the second man walked into the private office.

"Take a seat, sir, my name is Ingram." He was a man of about fifty with a short, reddish mustache. He had a gracious manner that inspired confidence. "What is your name?"

"Rudolph Seyon. I am a Belgian."

"From the State?"

"Yes, sir, from Sandpit."

"Glad to hear it," was the reply. "I have done considerable business with your people in Sandpit. I am sure that I can give you some splendid references. That land association is a most commendable organization. It has enabled many of your deserving people to get a start in life—and a start with a home and a farm is a real start—a real start! What is your business, Mr.—"

"Seyon."

"Yes, yes, let me write it down. Those names are not so easy to remember; but now I have it—Seyon! Seyon! and now your business."

"I bring a letter from the Belgian Society."

"As good as a draft on any bank in Nebraska. Security is of course the principal thing in our business. We must have good security. You have brought us the best there is, so it should be easy for us to make a deal. What property are you looking for?"

After an apology that he had been in the country but two years and knew but little English, Rudolph Seyon explained the object of his visit. Only a few days before he and his wife had been asked to take care of the house and farm of a certain Isidore Dobbs. The latter had been very frank with him in confessing that his whole farm was mortgaged and that he had little hope of saving it. Both Rudolph and his wife had become deeply interested in the farmer's little child, Rollin. They couldn't see little Rollin turned out into the world. It had been their intention to buy a farm later; but now they had decided to buy at once. They intended to keep Mr. Dobbs and the boy with them. The president of the Bel-

gian Association had agreed to advance the money and he, Rudolph Seyon, had come to close the deal.

After listening to the account Mr. Ingram pressed a bell.

"Bring me the file of the Dobbs estate," said he to the stenographer.

"Now, Mr. Seyon," began the real estate agent, when he had the papers, "you will see from this that farmer Dobbs had borrowed eleven thousand five hundred dollars. We refused to advance him another cent. In fact, we demanded settlement. The farm may be worth fifteen thousand, but—"

"It is worth twenty thousand," interrupted the visitor.

"You should not tell me," laughed the real estate agent. "What makes you think it is worth so much?"

The Belgian was frank in his statement. He had gone over the ground several times. He had learned from farmer Dobbs just how much corn and hay had been raised. Most of the land lay in a little branch of the Loup River. The hills made fine pasture land. It was worth twenty thousand—every cent of twenty thousand.

Again the agent smiled at the truthfulness

and simplicity of the visitor. But he was too noble and generous a man to take advantage of knowledge gained in this way.

The matter was gone over in detail. Rudolph Seyon put down his check for eleven thousand, five hundred dollars, received the mortgages, took his hat and departed. Passing out through the waiting-room he shook hands with the man who had so kindly allowed him to go into the office first.

Then visitor number one was ushered into the private office.

"Good-morning, sir," said the agent, with his beneficent smile. "My name is Theodore Ingram. And what is yours?"

"Ignatius, sir. Ignatius Bararana."

"You Indians have poetic names; but I suppose the Government school tagged the Ignatius on to you."

"No, sir, I got it from my grandfather. Father De Smet, the missionary, baptized my grandfather and gave him that name. My father had the name and so have I."

"Well, so much for the name," answered the man, leaning back in his easy chair, "and now for our business."

In simple words the Indian told his story. He had inherited a large tract of land in the

Blackfeet Reservation, Montana. He had come on to Nebraska to study agriculture in the Government school and then had hired himself out as a farm-hand to get further experience. For reasons which he did not wish to discuss he had decided not to return to Montana, at least for the present. Being anxious to buy a certain farm, he had negotiated a loan and had with him a check of eleven thousand, five hundred dollars. He laid the piece of paper on the table.

The agent looked over the check from the Omaha State Bank. "It's as good as gold," said he, "for anything I may have to sell."

"You have notes against the Dobbs farm?"

"I had—" stammered the agent.

"You had—and they are gone!" interrupted the Indian.

"Yes, I had—"

"My God, I am late!" exclaimed Ignatius, "and little Rolly is without a home."

The agent looked out of the window and nervously drummed the table with his fountain pen. "Did you see that man who went out before you came in?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Well—well—it's certainly hard luck for

you! Hard luck! But he has the mortgages!"

The Indian rose slowly from the office chair, shook the hand of the agent, then retired without uttering a word.

Reaching the street, Ignatius took out his watch. He had ten minutes to catch the local train to Sandpit. He hailed a taxi and in seven minutes was standing before the ticket office in the Union Pacific Station. Entering a coach he walked slowly along the aisle to see whether he could recognize the man who had bought the mortgages. "Yes, there he was!" Evidently he did not notice the Indian, who had purposely drawn his slouch hat down over his face.

At Sandpit Mr. Seyon was met by his wife, who had come in the farmer's buggy. She had been told of the object of his visit to Omaha, but it was kept a secret from Mr. Dobbs.

That night after supper Rudolph Seyon took from his pocket a large envelope, opened it and laid some papers before Isidore Dobbs. "The farm is safe," said he. "I own the mortgages, and they will never be sold. If at any time you get the money you can pay me and keep the farm; or if you prefer I'll pay you the balance and the farm is mine."

The farmer looked over the papers in silence; then he grasped the hand of the man who had come to work for him. "Rolly and myself will have a home for the winter," he muttered, "and we owe it to you, to you—to you." Then he paused: "If only Ig had a home!"

"Poor Ig! I wish we had Ig!" whimpered Rollin as thoughts of the Indian came back to him.

"Yes, I turned him out with no warning and no place to go," continued the heart-stricken man, "and he worked hard!"

"And played with me, and was good, daddy!" put in Rollin.

"Yes, he was good. If I only knew where to find him. Perhaps he is back in Montana. I'll try to find him. I must try to find him!" and the farmer's head sank down upon the table.

CHAPTER XII

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

"How is Rollin this morning?" asked Dr. Murt, as he and Walter leaped out of the machine.

"Here are two fine ducks and a goose for you," and Walter held up the prizes.

It was the morning after the hunting expedition and after the transaction at the Ingram real estate office. Dr. Murt had a double purpose in coming to the house of farmer Dobbs. He wished to see whether the farmer was seriously sick, and at the same time he brought a message from Ignatius Bararana.

Little Rollin had seen the automobile from the window and had slipped out to welcome his friends. The doctor observed that the exertion of running across the yard was plainly visible in the forced breathing of the boy; but he ignored the matter and asked: "How is your father, Rollin?"

"He's sitting in the house all the time—but gee, what fine ducks and what a big—big

goose!" The little fellow could not carry the goose, but let it drag on the ground.

"I have 'phoned for you several times," muttered the farmer, as Dr. Murt went into the room. "I wasn't exactly sick, but I wanted to see you. I am better this morning for I know that the farm is safe, at least for the winter. I can never thank you enough for bringing Mr. Seyon and his good wife here."

The farmer explained what Rudolph Seyon had done on the previous day and how his action had safeguarded the farm.

"And now," he continued, "if I could only find Ig. I sent the Indian away some days ago. Sent him away without a home and without warning."

"Do you wish to see him?" asked the doctor.

"See him, yes. I'd do anything for him."

"I have a message from him," interposed the doctor.

"You have—you have?"

"Be quiet, Mr. Dobbs, you are not well. Be quiet and I will tell you. Yes, I have a message from him."

"Where is he?" gasped the farmer.

"Be quiet," advised the doctor, "be quiet. I will tell you all."

"Thanks, thanks."

"To begin with, Ignatius Bararana was in Sandpit last night."

"So near," groaned the man.

"Yes, and sent a message to you," said the doctor. "But in the first place I wish to tell you that Ignatius Bararana is not a poor Indian. He is worth thousands of dollars from land which his tribe owns in Montana. He was working for you simply to get experience. He was anxious to stay for Rollin's sake. Don't interrupt me—let me tell you all!" And the farmer sank back in his chair, from which he had arisen in his excitement. "Yes, let me tell you all!" And Dr. Murt explained how Ignatius had tried to buy the mortgages for little Rollin's sake, and that he himself had assured the Indian that Mr. Seyon would look after the interests of the lad. Ignatius had therefore decided to start at once for Montana.

"Good Indian! Good Indian!" muttered the farmer.

"Yes, he is a good Indian, Mr. Dobbs, one of the noblest men I ever saw."

"And to think that I treated him like a dog," muttered the man.

"His action may have been suspicious," con-

tinued the doctor. "And now I have more to tell you. Do you remember another Indian called Injun Joe?"

"Yes, yes. I sent Ig away for letting Injun Joe come around."

"And did you ever hear of a white man called Sam Diggs?"

"I can't—can't recall the name."

"Well, he lives in Sandpit. He should have been hung long ago. He and Injun Joe have lived by stealing. It's hard to catch them, but everybody knows that they steal. I am going to see them when I go back to Sandpit. Injun Joe has got to leave the community, and I'll have Diggs behind the bars if he doesn't reform. And now about Injun Joe. He did come to your farm. He did speak with Ignatius. Do you know what he came for?"

"Some scheme with Ig," suggested the sick man.

"No, it was some scheme with Sam Diggs, Mr. Dobbs. They both thought that you had your house full of gold, and they wanted to rob you. Moreover, they wanted Ignatius to join in with them."

"They—they did—they did!" stammered the farmer.

"Yes, they wanted to rob you," but the doc-

tor did not let the sick man know that the two villains also wanted to murder him, and that Ignatius spurned their offers of money and had defied them. "Injun Joe came not once, but several times. Finally Ignatius threatened to have him arrested if he approached your farmhouse again."

"Then Ig was protecting me when I thought that he was plotting against me," muttered the man.

"Precisely, Mr. Dobbs; he was your best friend."

"Why didn't he say something about this matter?" the farmer asked.

"Remember he is an Indian, and Indians do not think as we do. Remember, too, that Injun Joe was one of his tribe. Ignatius was faithful to his tribesman, even if he didn't deserve it. But he was also true to you."

For some time they sat in silence. "Ignatius is gone," resumed the doctor, "and I want to assure you that Injun Joe will also go. I'll take care of Diggs, too, so that there will be no further danger. You have a good man to look after the farm during winter and all troubles are at an end."

"No," put in the farmer, "there is another trouble. These Seyons insist on having the

team to drive to church on Sunday. I don't believe in all this church business."

"Perhaps you don't," interrupted Dr. Murt, "perhaps you don't; but others do. I want to call your attention to the fact that the man who has helped you believes in church-going and the Indian who protected you believed in church-going. I have noticed that none of those who stay away from church have been here to help you."

"No! No!" assented the farmer.

"And if the Belgian works for you six days in the week, don't you think that he deserves a rest on Sunday?"

"Yes, let him rest, that's what Sunday is for. And let the horses rest."

"No, Sunday is for rest and prayer; and a trip into town will not hurt the horses."

"It may not during the winter," replied the farmer, "but during plowing-season horses need a day's rest every week."

"Yes, horses need care," argued the doctor, "and so does the soul of man. I tell you right now, Mr. Dobbs, those Belgians think more of their religion than they do of this farm; and when it comes right down to business they'll go to church. They'll go every Sunday. You may as well give in on this point."

"But I don't believe in it."

"Rudolph Seyon doesn't ask you to go with him to church. If he tried to force you to go, it would be a different matter. He lets you have your way, and you sit here in the house on Sunday; let him and his wife have their way and go to church."

But Dr. Murt did not stop here. Seated on the edge of his chair with his finger pointing right into the face of the unbeliever he spoke of God and one's duty to God. He used illustrations familiar to the man whom he was trying to enlighten. He did not convert Isidore Dobbs, nor did he expect to do so, but late that afternoon when the first snowfall filtered down from the sky Isidore Dobbs stood at the window, thinking of the power of the Creator, thinking of the unseen hand that mantled the earth in white. When he saw the ashen-gray clouds over beyond the hills and the faintest trace of purple in the west, there rushed upon him the thought of the Maker and Master of nature. The lesson of Dr. Murt had found at least a heart not entirely hardened—a mind not entirely darkened to all truth.

That night after supper and when all were still sitting at the table Isidore turned to Mr. Seyon and said: "You may have the horses

on Sunday. You and your wife go to church; but there is to be no religion talked in this house. I think it well for us to have this matter well understood. It may prevent trouble in the future.

Mrs. Seyon bowed her head in approval while the husband replied: "We only asked for the horses."

"It is understood that you are to have the team; but we are not to talk religion here."

"Well," said Mr. Seyon.

"Well," said the wife.

"I was talking to Rollin about God to-day," blurted out Walter. "He didn't know who made the flowers grow and I just told him."

"And you said God made the sun come up every morning," prated Rollin.

"You boys can talk all the foolishness you wish," replied the farmer, not a little provoked by the remarks of the two lads. "But I want to congratulate the cook. This duck is certainly fine," said he, changing the subject of conversation.

"And we ought to thank the young hunter who brought it for us," said Mrs. Seyon.

"Don't mind that," replied Walter, "it was lots of fun hunting them and more fun eating them."

"And we are going to have lots of fun playing 'thrashing' and catching muskrats," put in Rollin.

"I will get the steel traps to-morrow," promised Mr. Seyon.

The boys looked forward with keen delight to the experience of trapping muskrats and selling their skins. They even planned how to spend the income which they were sure to have from the sale. Walter had promised to remain a week or more with little Rollin and most of the time would be spent near the muskrat colony.

CHAPTER XIII

SAM DIGGS

INJUN JOE was a half-breed known for his cunning and meanness. The question had come up several times of driving him from the town; for although the proofs were missing all considered him guilty of more than one theft.

His associate was equally notorious, a certain Sam Diggs—a white man who worked during the busy seasons for the farmers of the neighborhood, but who spent most of his time loafing around the local depot.

Almost at any time of the day, or for that matter of the night, the white man and the Indian could be seen sitting on the platform with their legs dangling down upon the track. The Indian never wore a hat except during the extreme cold of winter. His long black hair fell down upon his shoulders. His red flannel shirt gave him an appearance of wildness. He was a powerful man, but stooped and pre-

maturely aged. His companion was short, lean, and sallow. He always had a quid of tobacco in the left side of his mouth. During the summer months he sat and swatted flies, while the rest of the year he whittled away at sticks.

"Just the two men I am looking for," said Dr. Frederic Murt as he walked up to the railroad station the morning after his visit to the Dobbs farmhouse. "Joe! Sam! I want a few words with you. Will you walk into the waiting-room?"

The two men followed the doctor into the room without a word of reply. Dr. Murt was well aware that he was assuming a dangerous task and that he was dealing with men who would stop at nothing for gain or revenge. Yet he was determined to push his plans and carry his point.

"You men know Ignatius Bararana," he began, as all three seated themselves in one corner of the waiting-room.

Both bowed assent.

"Well, he left town last night, but before he went he made a statement in writing that you two not only sought to rob Mr. Dobbs but that you planned to murder him. I have the statement and it is sworn to before the notary."

Neither one answered the charge. The Indian looked down at the floor and Diggs, shifting his quid of tobacco, stared out of the window.

Dr. Murt was determined not to be the first to break the prolonged silence which followed his accusation, for he felt that this was his chance to study the men and if possible to read their guilt in their actions. He stared at one, then the other, but neither flinched before his gaze. The Indian's face was a blank; Diggs wore a look of utter indifference.

Gradually the lips of the white man began to twitch, and his hand played nervously upon the window-sill. "Is that all?" he asked.

"No, it is not all; it is only the beginning."

"The Indian's a liar," protested Sam.

"He is as truthful a man as ever walked the streets of this town," affirmed the doctor.

"Why didn't he stay here and face me with his charges?"

"I'll do that and if necessary he'll come back here and face you."

"Let him do it!" were the daring words.

"He doesn't need to do it; Injun Joe here was witness to it all."

"What business is it of yours?" asked Diggs.

"I am making it my business for the pres-

ent," asserted Dr. Murt. "But first I am going to give you both a chance. Joe," he said, turning to the Indian, "you have got to leave this town to-day. I'll give you a ticket to Omaha, and I am going to stay right here with you until the train leaves. If you refuse to go I'll get a warrant for your arrest at once. I promised Ignatius to give you this chance and I'll do it. Will you go?"

"Ig gone, me no have friends, me'll go."

"And remember that you are never to return to Sandpit."

"Me no come back."

"Then your case is settled, and now for you," he continued, turning to Diggs again. "I have got proof enough to send you to the penitentiary, but I want to give you a chance."

"Look here, Doc, you ain't dealin' with no Injun, you is dealin' with a white man, an' one you can't scare. Do you hear?"

"I know the man I am dealing with; but I have started this business and I am going to see it through," rejoined the doctor not in the least perturbed by the boldness of Sam Diggs.

"How'll you see it through?"

"By putting you behind the bars."

"How'll you do it? Just tell how you'll do it."

"On the evidence I've got of intended murder and robbery."

"You ain't got no ev'dence; you ain't got nothin' on me. You is smart, and you don't know that Injun ain't a citizen and can't testify 'gin a white man."

"Ignatius Bararana is a citizen; he's got property and can testify."

"Go on wid you, he can't!"

"That'll be seen."

"Doc, you've called me lazy and good for nothin'! But I ain't lazy! I can git you all kinds of farmers to show you I've worked—worked hard—worked harder than any doctor. What do you do? You is got time for huntin' and ridin' round in your machine. Can't I take a little rest now and then, when there's no work? Can't I? Answer me that. Can't I? Am I lazy?"

"You have the name of being a loafer—and many people in Sandpit think you are a thief."

"That's the way people talk about a poor man. Why don't they tend to their own business? I'll bet you they're runnin' in to the city. Can't I set on the station and rest while they's got money to take the cars? Can't I? Who's going to stop me?"

"I'll stop you, if you ever go near the Dobbs farm. And I want to tell you, Sam Diggs, that old man Dobbs hasn't any money. There is nothing there to rob, nothing worth stealing. The Belgian there has the mortgage on the farm. Old man Dobbs is poor."

"Then what's all this talk about?" was the ready answer of the accused man.

"I simply wanted to show you that you and Joe were wrong in planning a robbery. You wouldn't have got a cent for your work. And now just a final word to you. I am your friend. I am warning you in time, you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," was the reply as Sam Diggs strolled out of the station. He returned after a few minutes and coming up to the Indian said: "Good-by, Injun Joe. Sam Diggs is your friend. Here's ten cents, it's all I got."

"By," replied the Indian in a childlike voice.

"Get your things and be back here at the station in half an hour," said Dr. Murt to the Indian.

"Me got nothin'."

"No coat or pants?"

"Me got nothin'."

"Get your shirts, socks, and so on."

"Me got nothin', all here," and the Indian put his hand upon his back.

"Well, I'll give you a letter to the Government agent in Omaha. He will look after you. I see now that you should have been sent from this place long ago. You got in with the wrong man. That Sam Diggs has simply ruined you. Wait here and I'll write the letter."

Half an hour later the train pulled out of Sandpit with Injun Joe aboard.

Standing behind a barn and unobserved by any one Sam Diggs watched the departing train. Then anger stirred within his breast.

Who was this Dr. Frederic Murt that he should threaten Sam Diggs? What power had he to command the Indian to go away? He would show this Dr. Murt that all threats were useless!

He would go out to the Dobbs farm on the following day. No one could convince him that old farmer Dobbs had not hidden gold away in his house. He would look around! He would see the best place to enter the house and then later he would get the gold.

Better not to have the stupid Indian with him. Now the gold would be all his, with no one to tell the tale of the robbery—Dr. Murt had done him a real favor by sending the Indian away! Ha! ha! ha!

"With ceaseless energy it grappled and tore the roots until the trees went whirling away like black and monstrous things of life."—*Page* 135.

Half an hour later Sam Diggs was sitting in his room. It was an attic without heat and with little light. Before him was a broken mirror. He was fitting on a beard of short reddish hair.

CHAPTER XIV

MUSKRATS AND A VISITOR

"Say, Rolly, you don't weigh as much as an angel."

"What's an angel, Walter?"

"Don't know what an angel is! Jiminy crickets! Don't know what an angel is! Why an angel is—an angel is—why, angels don't weigh anything."

"How do you know, Walter?"

"They are lighter than feathers. They can go from heaven to earth in a bat of the eye!"

"What's heaven, Walter?"

"Don't know what heaven is! Why heaven is the place where good people go after death."

"Where is it, Walter?"

"Gee, you ask a lot of hard questions. It's away up in the skies somewhere."

"Was you ever there, Walter?"

"Course not! Didn't I say that people went there after death? I ain't dead, am I? But say, you are the skinniest thing I ever saw. Why your muscles remind me of lead pencils. And your face—"

Here Walter paused. There was something in that face that seemed unearthly—pale, pleading, suffering—it was a picture and not a reality. It was almost ethereal. It idealized the angelic.

"Say you look like an angel. Were you ever baptized?"

"What's that, Walter?"

"Course you weren't. What's the use of my asking you that question; but some day you might be, and then you'll be a real angel, and just as pretty as your angel guardian. But up you go, little feather, little angel, and away you go to the muskrat domes!"

The two boys were on an inspection trip. Rudolph Seyon, who was in Sandpit, had promised to buy three steel traps. The lads had started out to look over the muskrat village and to conjecture where the Belgian would set the traps. They had gone but a short distance when Rollin began to breathe heavily and finally could go no farther. It was then that Walter had picked him up and exclaimed that he was as light as an angel.

Bearing his tiny burden Walter romped over the rough corn-field and soon stood near the shore of the lake.

The muskrats had located their house very

ingeniously. They were some fifteen feet from land, and yet the water was so shallow that it could with difficulty be reached in a canoe. Safe from attack by land or water, the colony had flourished until a miniature city had grown up under the industry of the inhabitants. All kinds of weeds and twigs were used in the construction, but corn-stalks formed the heavier timber for the buildings. It was a busy city where all day long close observation might witness the extension of new houses. They were all of the same style of architecture, with little inverted domes some four feet in diameter and three feet high, with the entrance at the bottom and through the water. But Mr. Muskrat didn't seem to mind a little dip even in the coldest weather, for he soon dried himself in his soft bed of satin corn huskings.

In the summer time the little animals made long trips from home and lived on sweet corn and vegetables; but in winter they contented themselves with feeding upon the roots which they found at the bottom of the lake. They were easily tempted with a slice of bread in a steel trap.

"Who will see the first muskrat?" whispered

Walter as he put his companion down on the ground.

"Gee, they are building lots of houses," said Rollin.

"So much the better, for there'll be more for us to trap, and remember we get thirty cents for each skin."

"Can you skin 'em?"

"No, but if Rudolph shows me I can."

"I want to learn too."

"We must both learn, for we are to get the money, Mr. Seyon said so."

"I wonder what that big house is?" and Rollin pointed toward a corn-stalk dome larger than the rest.

"That may be the church," replied Walter.

"Do muskrats go to church?"

"There you are again! Of course not! I was only fooling!"

"Will they go to heaven?"

"Good heavens! No!"

"I see one—I see one!" cried out Rollin.

"Yes, you are first," acknowledged Walter looking out where there was a stir in the water, "but you frightened it away."

The boys waited in patience for some time, but the muskrat did not reappear.

"They have all hidden," explained Walter. "Rudolph said that they told each other when there was danger, and they all stayed in their houses."

"Where will he set the traps?" asked Rollin.

"Let us look; he said that there were little paths or roads leading from the lake to the field; he'll put the traps in these roads."

Almost crawling along they sought in vain to find the highways of travel of the little denizens of the domed village.

"Here is a road," blurted out Walter as he bent down to make a close examination, "and gee, it's smooth. All the muskrats of the lake must go along this way."

"We'll tell Rudolph," put in Rollin, "and he'll catch them all."

"Catch all of what?" The two boys looked up and saw standing at their side a queer looking individual with a very funny red beard. It was Sam Diggs. "Lots of muskrats here," he continued, "and the skins are worth thirty cents each. But say, boys, I am hungry; can't you take me to the house and get me something to eat? I have walked all the way from Omaha and haven't had anything to eat for two days."

"We'll go up and see if Mrs. Seyon has something," said Walter.

"Are there any men at the house?" the stranger wanted to know.

"Mr. Dobbs has gone to town and Mr. Seyon with him. They are getting some steel traps, and we are going to catch muskrats and sell the skins."

"Do you know how to skin them?" asked the man.

"No, sir, but Rudolph is going to show us," replied Walter.

"And I am going to learn too," joined in Rollin.

"That's fine. I wish you good luck; but come on to the house and ask the lady to get me something to eat. I am glad the men are not at home, for I am very bashful. I'm a hard-working man and have never begged before."

"We can't walk fast," explained Walter, "for Rollin has a weak heart."

"Suppose I carry him. I like little boys, and he is such a nice-looking little boy."

"I carried him half way here," said Walter proudly.

"He don't weigh more than six feathers," asserted the man as he lifted the little burden.

"I said he was lighter than that," replied

Walter. "I said he was as light as an angel, and he did not know what an angel was."

"When I was a boy," said the stranger, "I was so good that my mother used to call me an angel; but since then I have become a black angel. Do you know what a black angel is?"

"I do," answered Walter, "but Rollin don't know anything about angels."

"Well, what is a black angel!"

"It's the devil," said the boy.

"You are right, my lad, the black angel is the devil. Of course I am not that bad; still I ain't as good as I used to be, and I'm so hungry that I could eat straw. Do you think the woman will give me anything?"

"She's mighty good," replied Walter.

"And she cooked two ducks for us and a great big goose," put in Rollin.

"I do hope that there is some of that goose left. I used to be a rich man and I had goose three times a week."

At the door they met Mrs. Seyon. "This man wants something to eat," said Walter.

"Is he a tramp?" she asked.

"No, madam, he's not a tramp," replied the man, at the same time making a profound bow. "It certainly hurts my feelings to be called a tramp. I am used to comfort and I would

ask you not only to give me something to eat, but let me go in and sit at the table in the dining-room." Without waiting for a reply or further invitation he walked into the room, still carrying little Rollin in his arms.

"Now, my little man," said he, "when I'm through eating I'll give you a nickel. Sit right here at the windy and look for your father and the man with him. If you see them coming just tell me, for I'll run out to meet the master of the house. Ah, how fortunate for me to come just at this time to get the remnants of the goose," he continued, turning to Mrs. Seyon, who had placed on the table a dish with a bountiful supply of bread and potatoes and cold meat, including the leg of a goose.

He had scarcely started to enjoy his repast when Rollin announced that the team was coming up the road with his father and Mr. Seyon.

Sam Diggs was determined to insist on further hospitality and to spend the night in the house. He was convinced that he would not be recognized. Whether he would rob that night or wait for another occasion would depend on the information which he was able to get from the farmer. He was rapidly running over in his mind just how he would greet the latter and what he would represent himself

to be, when Walter ran up to the window and announced that Dr. Murt's machine was following behind the team.

The visitor hastily gathered up the goose-leg and some bread, slipped out of the door, ran behind the barn and across the corn-field, where he lay hid until it was dark. Later he returned and slept in the barn loft.

The men paid little attention to the story of the two boys about the stranger. He was simply a tramp who had dropped in for a meal. The matter was given no further consideration.

CHAPTER XV

YOUNG TRAPPERS

"Git up, big horse! Git up—git up!" And Rollin struck at the Belgian with an imaginary whip, while over the rough ground the man carried the lad high up on his shoulder. Walter trotted by Mr. Seyon's side, carrying the three steel traps.

For days the boys had talked of nothing but trapping muskrats, and now the eventful morning had come and they were on their way to the lake.

"And you have found the road which leads from the muskrat colony," said Mr. Seyon to the little fellow whom he was carrying.

"Yes, indeed, and it's a big road."

"And there must be hundreds of muskrats going over it every day," joined in Walter.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because the ground is worn so smooth."

"Then we'll put the traps along this road. No doubt some of the rats are already getting their breakfast out in the field, and we'll catch

them when they return home to take their noon nap."

"Do you think we'll catch a hundred to-day, Mr. Seyon?" asked Rollin who pictured to himself whole droves of the little animals running into the traps.

"No, if we catch two each day I'll be satisfied."

"Can I set the traps, Mr. Seyon?" Walter wanted to know.

"Not to-day. One might catch your hand. Steel traps are dangerous, you know. This is a new kind we have. It most always gets the rat right around the neck and it is dead in a few seconds. The old trap frequently caught the animal by the leg and it suffered a long time."

In the meanwhile they were drawing near the colony, where an occasional splash showed that the inhabitants were up and working.

"Where is the road?" asked the Belgian, as they came close to the water.

"Right here, Mr. Seyon," and with pride Walter pointed out the path which led from the lake into the field.

"Big road—smooth road," said the man putting Rollin on the ground and stooping to examine the path.

"And the muskrats have one big house," put in Rollin.

"And you called it a church, and I wanted to know if muskrats went to church," laughed Rollin.

"My! my! my!" exclaimed the Belgian after further investigation, "big road—elephant road!"

"Oh, Mr. Seyon!" cried out Rollin, "elephants are in the circus. They couldn't get into one of those small houses."

"Big road! Big road! Very big road! Look at the tracks!" and the man pointed to them.

"I know, I know," rejoined Walter clapping his hands, "it's a pig road. Here is where the pigs come down to get water."

"Right you are, boy! Right you are! And now let us look for the muskrat path! It will be winding; it will go under bushes and grass for the little fellows don't want to be seen."

Soon it was found. It looked like a fairy path where the wee creatures slipped in and out at night.

"Here goes for the first trap," said the Belgian as he cut a slice of bread and fixed it on the trigger. "If a muskrat comes and looks at this trap it will catch the fellow."

"Well, we are looking at it, Mr. Seyon," remarked Rollin.

"But it isn't made to catch us. Of course the animal will have to smell at it a little, but if we haven't a thirty-cent prize before dinner I'm much mistaken."

Some fifty feet from the lake the path branched, one part leading to the corn-field and the other to an old cabbage-patch.

"We would be sure of getting one right at the fork of the road," said the Belgian, "but I want to know just where they are feeding. Let us set a trap ten feet away and one on each branch. We'll then find out from which direction they come."

After trap number two had been adjusted the Belgian turned to Walter. "You'll set the next one," he began. "Do as I tell you and there'll be no danger. Take this trap in your hand. You notice that the trigger is on this side."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, never catch hold of it there. Always take the other side and you'll never get in trouble. Now try. Get your hand beneath it. Now with the other hand pull back the spring."

"Snap!"

"You have it started. No danger, pull at it again."

"It wasn't so hard!" and Walter smiled as he drew the spring back.

"Now catch it with the trigger."

"But it isn't baited," said the boy.

"Not yet. I want you to practise with it first."

Walter repeated the lesson several times. "Why, it's easy," he said with delight. "Slip the bread on the trigger and set it again."

It was all simple under the direction of the man.

"Now, what must you always remember to do?" he asked.

"I know," blurted out Rollin. "Never catch it by the side where the trigger is."

"Good! Both of you remember it; and some day, Rollin, you can set one of the traps. But I must go to work. At ten o'clock you two can come down to the lake. If there is a muskrat caught bring the trap and the animal back to the house, for the trap has to be cleaned each time."

"Up on my back, little angel," and with these words Walter picked up his companion and jogged off toward the house. Yes, he

often so called the wee little fellow—Angel Rolly.

Those were two long, long hours—from eight to ten that morning. Had the clock stopped? Would the big hand ever make its rounds. It seemed a whole day before the small hand reached nine! Could they possibly wait until the second hour had gone by? The boys imagined scores of muskrats fighting over the traps and wondered which one would succeed in getting caught. It was too bad that there wasn't a trap large enough to catch the whole colony at once. They talked and imagined, and imagined and talked, and were so anxious to see what was really happening that they could no longer endure the torture of waiting. It was nearly half-past nine. They would walk slowly—very slowly—so as to reach the traps at ten.

They did walk slowly in the yard and for a few feet in the field, then Walter, eager to get to the traps, hastened his steps, with the result that little Rollin gasped and could go no farther. They rested for a while, then unable to bear the delay Rollin mounted upon Walter's back to take a ride.

The trap leading into the corn-field was just

as they had left it. But see—there in the other trap, only a few feet away, was the first catch!

"Hurrah!" cried Walter who was the first to see the prize.

"Is it dead?" asked Rollin as they approached closer.

"Dead as a door-nail," replied the other, touching the animal with his toe.

No hunter of large game ever prided himself more on the success of a shot than did the two boys on the work of their steel trap. They stood looking at the dead rodent, admired its coat of soft fur, and wondered and wondered what it would bring them in the market.

Carrying the trap and the muskrat they went on to the lake, but things here were undisturbed.

"We'll get one more before dinner," said Walter.

"And three more before night," were the hopeful words of Rollin.

They were starting back to the house when the man with the red whiskers approached. "Fine muskrat, boys! Fine one! Very fine one!" he said as he walked up to Walter and took the animal in his hand.

"We are going to get more," replied Rollin.

"Hope you do! Hope you do!"

"This is worth thirty cents, explained Walter.

"No, my young man, it's worth forty cents. It's the largest muskrat I ever seen, and now looking at it careful I'd say it's worth forty-five cents; yes, sirs, fifty cents."

Rollin's eyes opened wide as he thought of the great fortune which he and Walter would have.

"I'm going into town and will take it right along and bring you the money back to-night. You were so good to me last night that I want to pay you back, and I'll do you this favor."

"But you didn't pay me that five cents last night," pleaded Rollin.

"Forgot all about it! I'll give you ten cents to-night. I'm goin' to buy a farm near here and may be your neighbor in a few weeks." Without waiting for an answer the man removed the muskrat from the trap and handed the latter back to Walter. "I'll be back before night," were his parting words.

"I wonder whether that guy will ever come back!" ejaculated Walter after recovering from his surprise.

"He's a bad, bad man," asserted Rollin.

Back to the house they went and told their

experience to Mrs. Seyon, who laughed and said that the man was only a tramp and would never bring them the money.

They were comforted at noon by a second prize. Rudolph showed them how to smoke the traps and Walter ran down once or twice in the afternoon to rebait them, for it was too hard on Rollin to make many trips.

To the surprise of all the man did return at night, gave the boys fifty cents for the skin, and paid Rollin ten cents as he had promised; but he asked for supper and hospitality. His story about buying a neighboring farm was *not* convincing.

"See here, stranger," said Rudolph Seyon, to the red-whiskered man, after the latter had finished his meal, "we have given you supper and we would like to be kind to you, but you can't stay in the house. I'll let you sleep in the barn if you make me one promise."

"What is that?" asked the man curtly.

"That you won't smoke. You may sit in this room and smoke, and here is tobacco and a pipe; but I want your promise that you'll not smoke near the barn."

"It's your property," replied Diggs, "and I'm only a guest. Some day I may be a neighbor—a respectable, friendly neighbor—a true

and honest neighbor; but now I'm only a stranger, and I must accept what is offered."

The kindness and firmness of the Belgian had entirely disarmed the man. He spent the night in the barn, and early on the following morning made his way back to Sandpit.

Several muskrats were caught each day during the first week of the sport, then the number gradually decreased until finally Rudolph Seyon was of the opinion that few if any were left in the colony.

In all forty skins were sent in to Omaha and brought an average of thirty-one cents each. The boys divided the immense fortune with Rudolph and planned all kinds of things for the coming winter.

CHAPTER XVI

THAT RED-WHISKERED MAN

"If I gave you a letter would it make you homesick?"

"No, ma'am, I haven't been homesick for a month."

"Then here is a letter from your parents."

Walter and Mrs. Murt were sitting near the big stove in the living-room awaiting the return of the doctor. That morning Walter had come back from his rather long visit to Rollin, and had given an account of their trapping muskrats.

The boy opened the letter and read aloud. His father and mother, after enjoying their tour through Ireland, were about to start for the continent. They hoped to visit Rome and get the blessing of the Pope. They would probably return about the first of April.

"And what are you going to do?" asked Mrs. Murt. "Will you stay with us until June or will you go back to Chicago as soon as your parents return from their trip abroad?"

"I don't know; but I'm having lots of fun."

"And what do you like best?"

"That hunting on the Loup River was great," replied the boy, "but I did have a fine time catching the muskrats."

"And you don't know which sport you like the best?"

"Gee! it's all so good."

"I'm glad to know that you are enjoying it," said the woman with motherly affection.

"Oh! but I didn't tell you about the prairie-dogs."

"No, not a word; tell me about them," for Mrs. Murt was anxious to distract the boy's thoughts from the letter which he had just received.

"Well, we all got in the big farm wagon and drove to the prairie-dog colony. And Mrs. Seyon, she—"

"Did Mrs. Seyon go?"

"Why, yes, we called it a picnic, and all went except Mr. Dobbs."

"What did you do on the picnic?"

"Rudolph went off to hunt jack-rabbits, with my gun, and Rollin, Mrs. Seyon, and myself sat in the wagon and watched the little dogs, and listened to them bark. When you make a noise they just run in and hide, every

one of them. Then in a few minutes you see little heads sticking out, and soon all the little dogs are out sitting on the hills."

"Did you see the owls and snakes?"

"We saw the owls—lots of 'em; but the snakes didn't come out. I heard Dr. Murt say that there were snakes in the holes. Rollin went and looked into some of the holes and I yelled, 'Snakes!' Gee, Rollin nearly dropped. Say, he's got a bad heart, and it's getting worse every day. Why, I have to carry him around like a baby."

"Don't you get tired carrying him?"

"No, he don't weigh anything. I call him an angel. He is so light."

"And how do you know how much angels weigh?" asked the amused woman.

"I always thought angels didn't weigh anything, Mrs. Murt."

"Perhaps you are right; but tell me more about the prairie-dog colony."

"Well, we just stayed around all day, and Mrs. Seyon gave us a good lunch, and Rudolph killed two jack-rabbits and then we came home."

"I think that it is about time for class to begin," said Mrs. Murt, and with these words she walked over to the dining-room table and

rang a little bell. "I like to start with the bell," she continued, "it seems to me more like a real school. I enjoyed teaching, and it has been such a pleasure for me to teach you, Walter. I look forward to the pleasant hours we'll have in winter."

It had been understood that the doctor was to be Walter's instructor; but by degrees the wife had taken over the work, partly because she really enjoyed the teaching and partly because the doctor's hours were so irregular. At first she assisted Walter with his English, then she heard his lessons in modern history, and finally she worked with him over his problems in geometry. With real joy and enthusiasm she gave herself to the preparation of these lessons. Walter realized that she understood the matter thoroughly and presented it clearly. But that bell! the dreadful ringing of that bell before each class. It simply took the pleasure out of his work; he even grew nervous when his teacher went over to ring the bell.

"Mrs. Murt," said he faintly that night, "may I ask a favor?"

"Why, of course."

"And you won't be offended?"

"Walter, why do you ask such a question?"

"Because I am really afraid that I might offend you."

"Wal—ter!" she almost gasped.

"But if you only knew how I felt about it."

"Home! Your parents! What is it?"

"Neither home nor parents."

"What? Do tell me!" and she reached out and grasped his hand.

"It's the bell, Mrs. Murt. Please do not ring that bell when we begin to work."

"Why? Why, Walter? I thought that you liked it?"

"No, and I didn't want to tell you. It just makes cold shivers run down my back—indeed it does. It makes me feel as if I was going to be sent to jail—indeed it does."

"Why, Walter, I thought that it was so nice to hear the bell and then begin work, as they do in a regular school. Of course I won't ring it again, I thought that you would be pleased. Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

Then there was a short silence. Walter felt abashed at his own request, and the doctor's wife was really grieved to learn that she had given him any pain.

"Now, Walter," she resumed, "I want to ask a favor of you."

"Certainly," and he tried to smile.

"In the future I want you to tell me what to do for you. I want to make this study a real pleasure for both of us. I was so accustomed to the bell, and it reminded me so much of school! I liked teaching so very, very much, so you will let your teacher know, like a good boy, just when she can do anything for you."

"You are doing too much already," he said in almost a whisper.

Then the lesson in geometry was taken up; and was followed by modern history and English.

"I like the way you teach English," said the lad after some time had been spent in correcting an exercise. "In Chicago I wrote about things in books, but now I write about the things I see."

"You will like it still more in the spring, when we can go down to the swamps and gather violets."

"I am going to write a description of that wolf-hunt," said the boy.

"And why not write a composition on trapping muskrats?"

"I have so many subjects that I scarcely know which one to choose," he acknowledged.

"But there is the doctor at last," said the woman as she heard a noise on the porch.

Opening the door she saw before her a shabbily dressed man with red whiskers.

"Pardon me, ma'am; but I am a stranger here and would like to ask for something to eat."

"It's rather late, my good sir; I have just kept enough in the house for my husband, who is expected at any moment."

"Can't you spare a little for a very hungry and deserving citizen?"

"I don't know about the deserving citizen," laughed the lady of the house. "All of you tramps claim to be deserving citizens."

"Pardon me, lady, but I am not a tramp; I am a respectable citizen who has come here to investigate real estate."

"Generally such persons would have sufficient to pay for their meals."

"I met with hard luck and lost my pocketbook."

"Just wait. I'll get you something to eat."

"Won't you let a person step into the house?" pleaded the stranger. "It's a cold night, and I'm used to comfort."

"Come in, then, and sit near the stove with this little boy."

The doctor's wife went to the dining-room and soon returned with a plentiful supply on a dish.

"My good woman," said the stranger, "a thousand thanks! I'll just take what you have brought and eat it outside. Good night and many thanks!"

"A rather polite tramp," said Mrs. Murt to Walter.

"Oh, Mrs. Murt," cried Walter, as soon as the door was shut. "I saw that man before. He was begging at Mr. Dobbs's house. He took the first muskrat we caught and gave us fifty cents for it. That's the very man. I know it is."

"Gracious!" cried the woman, standing by the dresser, "did that man come over here to the dresser while I was in the dining-room?"

"Yes," replied the boy, "he went over and brushed his hair."

"And stole my ring and a—a—and a pocket-book!"

"The thief!" exclaimed Walter.

"Walter, my boy, ring up the town marshal; tell him to come to Dr. Murt's residence at once. The first time I ever let a tramp into the house. It will be a lesson for me—a real good lesson for me!"

The marshal came, got a description of the man, and then went out to search for him. No one had seen a stranger in the village that

afternoon or night and no trace of the thief could be found.

In the meanwhile Sam Diggs had reached his room. "Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed. "I'll show that smart doctor! I'll show him! He can't frighten Sam Diggs. He might scare the Injun! Ha! ha! Went right into his own house and got his own pocket-book. Ha! ha! Five—ten—twenty—thirty dollars—Sam Diggs will start on a trip this very night. Some day he'll come back and get old Dobbs's gold. You can't fool Sam Diggs! Old Dobbs is rich! He's got gold and Sam Diggs will have his share! Ha! ha! ha!"

All the while he was packing his few clothes into an old satchel, and in less than half an hour he was far from town.

When Dr. Murt returned he asked for a full description of the tramp. Then calling up the marshal he had a conference with him.

"I suspect some one right here in town," he said to the official.

"If he broke into a house, yes, but who would walk up to the front door. He'd be recognized."

"Unless he were disguised."

"Oh, you think it was some one wearing a—"

"A false beard—a red beard."

"And who?"

"Sam Diggs. It was Sam Diggs, marshal; and we've got to go right to his room."

"It can do no harm to investigate," said the official.

"No, it can do no harm."

They started off at once. Up the dark stairs the two men crept, and knocked at the door. No answer came.

"Throw our weight against the door," ordered the marshal. They did so and the door gave way with a crash. The room was empty. By the aid of the official's flashlight they found a false beard of red hair.

"That settles the question," exclaimed Dr. Murt.

"You were right in your suspicion," granted the marshal.

Word was immediately sent to the neighboring towns and railroad stations, but no trace could be found of the missing man.

CHAPTER XVII

ANGEL ROLLY

WALTER continued to devote some time to his books during the fall and winter, studying under the direction of Dr. and Mrs. Murt who proved efficient and interesting instructors.

He and the doctor made several hunting expeditions to the Loup River, and when the snow fell enjoyed shooting jack-rabbits.

An occasional visit was paid to Rollin, who in turn spent some time with Walter.

December came on and with it the beautiful feast of the Nativity. Rollin had a Christmas tree. He did not know what it all meant, but the tree with its lights was wondrous indeed.

During the long winter days the little boy was in the house with Mrs. Seyon while his father and the Belgian were out on the farm or feeding the stock. Day after day she told the little boy of God and the angels and saints. She saw that the flame of life was burning low

and before that flame went out she was determined to have the child baptized.

So gently and tactfully did she do the work that farmer Dobbs never for a moment objected to the influence that was being brought to bear upon Rollin. At times the lad spoke of the things he had heard, but the father understood not the mysteries which were mentioned.

This much Rollin learned well. That there was a good God who punished those who did evil and rewarded those who were good. That there was another life after the present one; that there was a beautiful home called heaven, and that all who entered heaven must be baptized.

Winter came and went. The honk of the wild geese was heard overhead as they returned from their southern sojourn; and flocks of wild ducks dipped into the lake, tarried for a while and then sailed on to their northern homes.

One chill day in March Rollin was taken with a cold which quickly developed into pneumonia. Dr. Murt pronounced the case critical indeed. With the lad's frail form and the condition of his heart it seemed scarcely possible that he could pull through the ordeal.

The doctor had several calls to make that day, and could not promise to return until the following morning. Walter, who had come out for a visit to his little friend, at the urgent request of the Belgian woman, remained.

That afternoon when the men were in the field plowing, Mrs. Seyon came in and whispered to Walter: "You must baptize little Rollin."

"I don't know how," and the boy shrank to the side of the room.

"Yes, you do! You learned it in the catechism class."

"But I've forgotten, Mrs. Seyon! Indeed I have!"

"You haven't. Come out in the other room and I will show you."

"Send for the priest!" pleaded the affrighted Walter.

"Hush! hush! Mr. Dobbs will never let a priest come into this house!"

"But I don't know how!"

"I will show you. Come! Come!"

A sudden fright had seized the boy. He forgot everything he had learned about the sacrament of Baptism.

"I can't! I can't!" he affirmed as he went into the kitchen and threw himself into a

chair with his arms resting on the table. "I can't! I know I can't!"

"Don't you like little Rollin, Walter?"

"Yes."

"Would you do him a favor?"

"Yes—m-a-a-m."

"Don't you want him to go to heaven?"

"Yes—m-a-a-m."

"Must he be baptized?"

"Yes. Y-e-s—m-a-a-m."

"I have been teaching him all winter. He knows all about God and heaven, and he knows that he must be baptized. You, his little friend, must baptize him."

"How? how?"

"Come, I will show you. You can practise. Here's a cup of water. Pour it on my hand and say the words."

Three times the boy repeated the act, each time saying the words, which now came back to him so readily that he wondered how he had ever doubted or forgotten.

Big tears gathered in the boy's eyes, and with trembling hand he carried the cup of water into the room. Near the bed Mrs. Seyon reminded Rollin of the sacrament which he was to receive. It would make him a child of God and if he died the angels would carry

him to heaven. Then she held a cloth under the child's head and drew Walter nearer to the bed.

"Pour the water on his forehead," she said, "and say the words: 'I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.' "

He did so; and a sudden strength came into his hand and voice.

The good woman dropped upon her knees and wept with holy joy. Walter, too, knelt and prayed.

"Now you are an angel, Rollin," she whispered, "a real angel. And, oh, you look like an angel, Rollin!"

Angel now he was! The beauty of his soul was stamped upon his countenance. His little companion had poured the saving water upon his forehead and in his soul grace had wrought its marvelous change. Angel now he was! Angel Rolly!

The Belgian woman now brought a blessed candle, lighted it and put it near his bed. It was symbolical of the light of faith which now was his.

The afternoon went by, the candle burned low, and with it was going—going the frail delicate life of angel Rolly.

He was weak, so weak that he felt no pain; but his mind was bright and with the Belgian woman he repeated an act of love.

The candle burned and dropped and went out; darkness came on. Rollin's eyes were closed.

Mrs. Seyon bent over him. There was a gasp. She saw the end was near. She placed her hand under the child's head.

"Kneel down and pray," she whispered to Walter, "Rolly is dying."

The boy sank down, joined his hands and prayed.

Another faint gasp. It was the end. The soul of little Rollin went forth to God.

Mrs. Seyon let the head fall back upon the pillow. How gently it rested there! Rested as if little Rollin slept.

"Your little friend has gone to heaven," she said faintly to Walter.

"I called him angel," answered Walter, "for he was so white and beautiful. Now he is an angel! Angel Rolly has gone to the other angels in heaven!"

The father came in, and saw at a glance what had happened. He dropped into a chair and sat in silence. The Belgian workman fol-

lowed, removed his hat, fell upon his knees and prayed.

Two days later they buried little Rollin on the hillside above the house. Dr. and Mrs. Murt were present, with the two Belgians, Walter, and the father. None of the neighbors came.

Cold and drear it was the morning when they laid the little body to rest in the grave which Rudolph had dug; but soon the wild violets would bedeck the mound and morning glories would creep upon it, and the yucca would throw its clusters of flowers over it.

Sleep, Rollin! Angel Rolly, sleep. Blessed soul that went before its God with the waters of Baptism still moistening the forehead of the frail body.

Sleep, Rollin! Though death has claimed its own and earth has claimed its own, the spirit has been stronger than they. Up, up to God has it risen midst jubilations.

Sleep, Rollin! But thy sleep is not to be forever. Some day the touch of the hand of God will be felt, and this frail body of corruption will arise, and into it will enter thy soul with all its wondrous beauty.

But sleep now—Angel Rolly—sleep!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SAND-STORM

JUNE had come. It was warm and bright. A wind sprang up. It was a playful wind. It bent the tops of the morning glories on the hills; it tossed the blossoms of the marigold in the marshes; it rocked the fledgling herons in their cozy nest among the sand cherries; it ruffled the checkered breasts of the prairie-chickens as they sailed through the great sea of air.

In this endless world of rolling sand-hills it seemed that nature would never put forth her strength. Here there was nothing to awaken or defy the powers of the elements. All was unbroken monotony! All was boundless peace!

But there was no peace in the heart of one who tramped the highway on that shimmering day of June. Sam Diggs had returned to Sandpit with the avowed purpose of robbing Isidore Dobbs. No one could deceive him longer with the idle stories of the farmer's

being poor! Rich he was! Gold he had! That gold must belong to Sam Diggs!

The day went on. The wind was still playful; but it caught up the sand here and there and scattered it over the clusters of blooming yucca. The prairie-chickens shrank before the wind and hid in the bunch-grass. The fledgling herons crept low in their little nest, which tipped and rocked with the quivering branches.

Noon came. The wind was no longer playful. Out in the corn-field the leaves arose and scattered like great flocks of affrighted birds. The whirling sand swept over the hills and all but obscured the vision.

On the porch at the Dobbs farm-house stood Walter Blakestone and Rudolph Seyon. The former had come out to visit his friends and say a prayer at Rollin's grave before starting for Chicago, for his parents had returned from their foreign travels and had sent for him. Dr. Murt, who had brought Walter from Sandpit and had gone on a sick-call, was to pass by later in the day and take the lad with him.

"Look! See! Two storms are coming!" suddenly cried the Belgian to the boy.

Two clouds had appeared on the horizon,—

one to the east and one to the west. Closer and closer they came; blacker and blacker they grew. Darkness swept on with rapid wings.

Chickens scurried to their roosts, and a mother heron turned its flight to the nest in the sand-cherry cluster.

The pent-up forces of nature were loosened; the hurricane fountains were thrown open! Closer and closer they came; blacker and blacker they grew—the cloud from the east and the cloud from the west!

Out into the yard walked Isidore Dobbs—first affrighted, then terrified, then speechless with wonder.

Closer and closer they came; blacker and blacker they grew—the cloud from the east and the cloud from the west! Loud were their voices! Defiant were their cries! On! On! And with a wild death challenge they met!

No man nor beast might stand within their paths! Round and round whirled the wind-storms. With giant hands they delved deep into the sand, heaved it forth and scattered it in great clouds. Torrents of sand went spouting into the air; streams of sand came rushing to the ground!

On the side of the hill was a long corn-bin half filled with the last year's crop. This

wooden structure was suddenly drawn into the air where it poised on the crest of a sand wave. Then the great currents tossed it higher and toyed with it like a ball in the jet of a fountain. A moment later it was rent asunder with its timbers scattering as so many straws in a gale, and its treasure of corn falling in a golden shower.

The apple-trees around the corn-bin for a while bid defiance to the hurricane. Although leaves were stripped from the branches, and the young fruit was scattered with the dust and sand, still the trees hung tenaciously to the soil. But deep into the ground the storm dug and dug. It gnawed and tugged at every fiber. With ceaseless energy it grappled and tore the roots until they were broken and shredded. Then the trees went whirling away like black and monstrous things of life.

A sand-shower rained down upon the head of Isidore Dobbs as he turned into the house. In rushed Walter and the Belgian gasping for breath, for their throats were parched and choked with the flying dust.

Now all within was black as night. An oil lamp was quickly lighted. Every joint of the frame house squeaked and quivered. Sand came in under the door; sand worked its way

through every window; sand filtered up through the crevices of the floor; sand poured down in a stream through the chimney.

With a crash a window pane blew in and after it came a veritable river of sand. No living thing could breathe in the air. Up to the second floor the inmates felt their way. But here too the windows were broken and the sand was pouring in. Higher up they crept to the attic, where there was but a single window, sheltered from the storm. It was their only hope. If it broke death was inevitable.

Out in the yard the chickens fluttered, gasped and died. The horses stampeded, gained the open field and escaped death. Following them were some of the cattle, while others were caught in a corner of the fence, against which they beat madly until they fell exhausted.

From the road near the house came a cry. It was a cry for help. It was the voice of Sam Diggs. When the storm came on he had seized upon it as the best occasion to carry out his design. Black as were the clouds they were not blacker than the heart of the robber. Rob he would! If resisted he would kill! Come what would he would have the gold of farmer Dobbs!

The storm struck him as he neared the house. He only coughed at first when the dust whirled around him. Then he was gradually blinded, his eyes burning with an unnatural irritation. He sought the fence and groped his way along, thinking the gale was but a passing sand-storm.

The sand seeped down his back and crept into his ears and nose and eyes. He closed his burning eyes and dragged himself along the fence. Into his throat the sand filtered. As he opened his mouth for breath he felt a stifling sensation. He tried to call for help, but found that his voice was feeble indeed. In desperation he sought to cry aloud, but the sand choked him all the more. Gasping he left the fence and tried to run. But soon he fell for want of air!

Into his ears, into his eyes, into his nose, into his mouth the sand was forced by the beating, whirling wind. He could no longer breathe. He gasped and struggled in agony. The agony was short. Near the roadside lay the corpse of the robber—the would-be murderer. The sand fell over the body, gradually covering it.

From the small window in the attic the prisoners saw a break in the clouds. Then streams of light came forth from the south. The

disc of the sun could be plainly distinguished. The roar of the storm among the rafters was no longer heard. The sand in the air settled down rapidly and seemed like a great curtain folding in the skies. After it the lighter dust filtered down like the mist of morning.

Gradually the great black curtain which veiled the sky was pulled aside. The sun burst forth and glinted over the newly formed beds of sand. Down to the second floor crept the men and the woman. On the floor were six inches of sand. Everything was covered with it—tables, beds, chairs. It had penetrated into every nook and corner. The first floor was even worse, and in corners the drifting sand was three feet high.

Without the house, the whole face of nature had been changed. Mounds of sand six feet in height were formed against the side of the building. For a long distance the whole hillside was torn away. And greatest of all wonders—the lake below had ceased to be! Not a drop of water was left in the basin. It was an arid extension of sand. In fact, the sand had not only filled the lake, but was fully a foot higher than the former water level. Not a living object was in sight! Desolation, utter desolation, brooded over the scene.

While the occupants of the house talked in subdued tones, as they stood upon a single small space in front of the house where the eddies had swept the drift away, some neighbors appeared at the front gate, walking with difficulty over the new bed of sand. Soon the farmers for miles around were gathering at the Dobbs farm-house.

They brought the news that the storm was local—only the farm of farmer Dobbs had suffered. True, the dust and sand had been scattered for miles around, but only small quantities which were not noticeable when the storm had abated.

People in the valley below told of the sudden rush of water which followed the filling of the lake. At first the stream was clear, then with it came immense volumes of sand.

All spoke of the two black clouds which had met on the ridge above the farm-house. Here they had formed the great twirling mass which belched forth clouds of sand until the whole country around was darkened. It was a terrible and wondrous sight! People had prayed, thinking every minute that their own house would be caught in the power of the resistless storm.

Soon Dr. Murt came walking in, for he had

to leave his machine fully a quarter of a mile down the road.

The curious, ever increasing crowd now scattered and walked over the farm. It was soon discovered that a new basin had been dug out along the side of the hill. It would soon be filled with water, some thought, as a whole hillside drained into it.

A farmer brought the news that the three horses were safe. Further investigation showed that many of the cattle were out in the fields.

Farmer Dobbs had paid little attention to the neighbors, who had come unbidden upon his property. Now, however, when Dr. Murt appeared he approached him and said in an undertone: "Will you take me back to Sandpit with you?"

"I will do anything for you, Mr. Dobbs."

"I know you will, but this is the last favor I will ever ask. I'll be ready in fifteen minutes. Will you start then?"

"As you wish!" replied the physician.

"Say nothing about it to any one," and with these words the farmer returned to the house. Taking an old valise from a wardrobe and shaking the sand from it, he began to pack the few things which he possessed. Every gar-

ment was covered with sand and dust. When he had finished the preparation for departure he called the Belgian and his wife.

"I am going now. All that is left is yours. If you can find the grave of little Rollin take care of it. Later I may write and give my address. I can not stay in this place another hour. That storm will haunt me! Good-by! And thank you both for your kindness to me and little Rollin. Good-by!"

"But the farm is still yours," pleaded Rudolph Seyon.

"No, it won't be worth the mortgage."

"Won't you wait and see; it may turn out well," said the Belgian woman.

"No!—No! I am going! Good-by, Walter; good-by, all!" and he shook their hands. He passed through the crowd of visitors without a word of recognition, and with Dr. Murt was soon trudging over the drifted sand toward the automobile.

Dr. Murt insisted on carrying the valise, and leading the way.

"That looks like a human form," said he, glancing to the side of the road. Walking over to the mound, with his hand he brushed the sand away. "Great heavens!" he exclaimed, "it's the body of Sam Diggs!"

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN NEIGHBORS BECOME FRIENDS

"All hands to work!" shouted farmer Ballweg, one of the neighbors who had come to the Dobbs farmhouse. "Let us help these people! Hurry home, you men, and get wagons and shovels, and bring brooms and mops for the women. Let us help these people and clean up the place before night!"

Farmer Ballweg was a leader in the community. At his word there was a movement in the crowd. Young men leaped upon their horses and started home to get the farm wagons and to bring brooms and dusters for the women. The great black clouds were still hanging on the horizon when the work of removing the sand had begun.

One of the neighbors came into the yard and notified Mr. Seyon that he had located seven of the cattle which had been stifled. He had also cut their throats. With three other men he would rush the dead cattle to the refrigerator

in Sandpit where they would bring their real value in the meat market.

In the house women were soon at work packing dishes, furniture and clothing. It was decided to remove everything from the rooms. With old baskets, buckets and pieces of wood the men and boys were carrying the sand from the house.

Soon a few wagons arrived with teams and scrapers. After a brief consultation it was decided to throw the sand at the lower corner of the yard where it slanted toward the former lake. This would simply level the yard and enlarge it.

"Ha—ha!" cried farmer Ballweg who, with several of his friends, was shoveling sand from the chicken coop. "Here they are! Chickens for sale! Every farmer here must buy a chicken. They are dead, but you always kill chickens before you eat them; and now you will be saved the trouble of killing them. We'll have an auction of chickens. Stop your work there, ladies. Come right out and buy a supply of meat for to-morrow. It's a fair sale! A fair exchange! You take this fat chicken home with you to-night, and to-morrow or the next day—no, wait a minute," he said, speaking for a moment to Mr. Seyon,

"not to-morrow, but after three days, you bring in a live chicken."

Great hilarity now followed as all gathered around the farmer and the auction progressed. Mr. Ballweg dilated upon the merits of every chicken which he exhibited before the crowd. "Just look at this rooster!" he exclaimed. "It's as fat and tender as a turkey. Going! Going!—Sold! Now, sir," said he to the purchaser, "you are to bring back the finest rooster on your farm and even that will be poor pay."

Soon the chickens were all disposed of and the buyers were back at their work. Fully a hundred people were engaged in helping around the house. All were surprised at the progress, for before dark the women were resting in the house with all the rooms spotlessly clean, and were enjoying a lunch which some had thoughtfully provided.

Walter and some other boys came running down from the top of the hill with the news that the grave of little Rollin was not touched. Many trudged over the sand and climbed the hill to verify the report. True it was! Only a few feet from the grave the wind had torn a great hole in the ground; the little grave, however, was not only undisturbed but not the slightest traces of sand could be seen upon it.

Gradually the happy neighbors went away, leaving behind them, however, a bountiful supply of provisions.

It all seemed a dream, a wondrous dream to Mr. and Mrs. Seyon as they sat at the table that night with the flickering light of a lantern before them.

Early on the following morning Dr. Murt came. "I have some good news," he said to the Belgians.

"We have had enough bad news," replied the man.

"But we are thankful to God that our lives were spared," said the wife, "and the neighbors were so very, very kind."

"God did you a favor in sending the sandstorm," said the visitor.

"Good comes with every evil, they say," replied the man.

"But this was not an evil; it was a good, a real good. I have been walking over the farm since daylight. Well, what did the storm do? It moved tons and tons of sand. It filled up a lake of about seven acres and dug out another lake of three acres, deeper and better located."

"But there is no water in the new lake," said the wife.

"You would be surprised," he explained,

"but there is fully a foot of water in the lake.

"As I said," resumed Dr. Murt, "you are about four acres ahead on the change."

"Yes," objected the Belgian, "but fully fifty acres have been covered with sand."

"Probably not over thirty acres," said Dr. Murt, "but remember that all the country is covered with sand. Sometimes the sand fifteen feet beneath the surface has more vegetable matter in it than that which is reached by a plow or the roots of grass. This is true in the present instance. You'll find that the new surface will make the best hay land on the farm, and after a few years will be good for corn and oats. It just depends on two things —a good rain and very little wind. If we only have a good shower and if the wind does not blow beyond the normal I predict that young bunch-grass and blue-stems will stick their noses out of the ground before two weeks have passed. And in less than a month the entire new soil will be green."

"I hadn't thought of that," replied the Belgian.

"I have made a study of this region and have experimented on a small scale," explained the doctor, "and I feel that I am absolutely right in my conclusions. Now," he continued,

"we'll make an experiment. We'll walk over to the hill where the ground has not been disturbed and dig a small box full of soil. Then we'll fill another box of the same size with the new sand. In each we'll plant some redfieldia seed, put them in the same place, and water them daily. If the seed doesn't grow better in the new sand I'll give you a milk cow."

The conversation was interrupted by some neighbors who brought a supply of meat, bread, and vegetables for the Belgians. In fact, curiosity and compassion continued to attract the farmers for many days. Even little children who had regarded the house as haunted came with their parents, and clung to them affrighted as they went into the building.

To the different visitors Dr. Murt explained his theory that the farm had been improved by the hurricane. They were inclined to doubt his optimistic views; but a close examination of the newly formed strata convinced them that there was a possibility of the land being good for grass.

Dr. Murt's predictions came literally true. The redfieldia grew twice as high as did the grass in the other box. Soon the layer of sand over the field and the hillside began to assume a greenish tint.

Gradually the storm and its effects were forgotten by both the curious and the friendly.

After a careful inspection of the farm by a number of Belgian farmers, who had gone security for the loan to Rudolph Seyon, it was agreed that the estate was worth at least fifteen thousand dollars, and the present occupant was justified in offering that sum to Mr. Dobbs.

The latter was astonished when he received the communication, for in his despair and hasty departure he was convinced that all was lost. He gladly accepted the offer. With this arrangement he could pay off the mortgage to Mr. Seyon and still have three thousand five hundred dollars. The papers were drawn up and signed, and the Dobbs farm became the property of Rudolph Seyon.

CHAPTER XX

FAREWELL TO THE SAND-HILLS

WALTER'S departure from Sandpit had been delayed a few days by the incidents of the sand-storm; but now he was ready to go, and was spending the last evening with the Murts.

"You must listen to one of my pupil's compositions," said Mrs. Murt to the doctor, as they sat on the porch with their young friend.

"Well, we'll hear about the storm," replied the husband.

"No, he has not finished it."

"I didn't begin it," put in Walter. "I thought that it would be an easy subject but I couldn't get the description started."

"Then let us hear about the killing of the wolf," suggested the physician.

"He has written a long account of the incident—a really graphic account; but it is not my choice. I want you to hear his composition on: The Flowers of the Sand-Hills," pleaded Mrs. Murt.

"It is easy to see that he has had a woman teacher," remarked the doctor. "But let us hear about the flowers. No one loves the flowers of Nebraska more than I. I used to think that flowers were for children, but I find more interest in them the older I get. Yes, let us have the composition on flowers."

"I don't like to read it to you, Dr. Murt, for it was intended for those who had never seen the flowers of Nebraska."

"Knowing something about the subject I may enjoy it all the more."

"But I am sure that you will find mistakes in it."

"I don't think so, for you know as much about the flowers as I do."

"That is kind of you, Dr. Murt, but I am sure that I have much to learn."

"We shall both enjoy hearing it," said Mrs. Murt.

In the gathering twilight Walter read his composition:

SOME OF THE FLOWERS OF THE SAND-HILLS

Wondrous truths, and manifold as wondrous,
God hath written in these stars above,
But not less in the bright flowerets under us,
Stands the revelation of His love.

LONGFELLOW.

There has always been a depth of meaning in the tribute which the heart of man in all ages has paid the flowers. And what an opportunity we have here at the foot of the sand-hills to make the innumerable wild flowers our dearest friends.

Among the earliest and best loved flowers is the marsh marigold, which blossoms out like a patch of sunshine from a dark sky. As soon as the snow has left the ground you begin your search.

I have gone to the swamps near the Loup River in the evenings to gather a large bouquet and while carrying them home found it necessary to change them from hand to hand in order to warm my fingers. The larger and brighter colored flower is found about the first of May. The best variety grows in the very low and swampy portions of the valley, are about the size of a half dollar, and bright yellow in color. The stems are hollow and very smooth.

Just at the time that the marigolds are plentiful and we are searching for the largest flower, another little visitor attracts our attention. It has barely raised its slender stem above the ground to the sunlight and we are delighted to find under the shady leaves a cluster of violet buds. We jealously watch our plant and in a few days carry home a modest bouquet of sweet scented violets. The violet is a tiny, deep blue, fine petaled blossom with a dash of yellow and red sunk into its chalice, and upheld by a single pale green stem from amidst a profusion

of rather large leaves at its base. These little symbols of humility stay with us till midsummer.

During the month of June the wild rose makes the sand-hills look like a vast flower bed. This delightful little plant grows best in a sheltered, sandy soil, and often along grain fields. The blossoms vary from white to crimson, but the most beautiful shade is a soft pink. These flowers are found in their richest color during the latter part of June, and stay with us until about September.

The beauty, fragrance and sweetness of the flower are not vain attributes; each is designed for a rare purpose. The colors allure and attract the passer-by, be he insect, bird, or man. The pot of nectar is a sufficient reward for the insect; and the transfer of the pollen from one rose to another by the clumsy but welcome guest, is the end for which all this beauty, fragrance, and sweetness have been produced.

The buttercup grows on the hillside or on the prairies. It is a flower whose life, and even whose color signifies its cheerfulness. It is a strong plant, about one foot in height. The stems are clustered from the thickened roots. The blossom is on the stem and is about a quarter of an inch in diameter. It is also cup-shaped. The petals are spatulate-oblong and a bright yellow in color.

The sand-cherry is probably the most important of the native fruits of the sand-hills of Nebraska. It is perennial, growing as a bush, usually from

fifteen to eighteen inches high, although under favorable conditions it may reach a height of about thirty-six inches.

This plant blossoms very early in the spring. The blossoms are white and have a very delicious fragrance. The fruit which appears in a short time is green in color and about the size of an early orchard cherry. After some time the cherry changes to a reddish color and finally to a brownish black. This last change does not take place until harvest time when the fruit is ripe.

The sand-cherry grows best on a side hill, where there has been a mulch from the winter snow, or in sandy creek bottoms. It does not seem to thrive as well now as it did in the time of the early settlers of Nebraska. Then fruit was not so plentiful and people were most grateful for the sand-cherries brought home for cooking. It is said that the children after a few hours' outing would come home with bushels of cherries in a wagon. These were cooked and put away unsweetened, later to be used in making sauce, jellies and pies.

The birds also took advantage of the plentifulness of these cherries and used them as their chief article of food. At the present time the birds destroy much of this delicious fruit.

"Have you fallen asleep, and have you no comments to make?" asked the teacher when Walter had finished the reading; for the doc-

tor, with his head resting in his right hand, was looking pensively at the floor.

"Yes, I have a comment," he began slowly. "I heard and enjoyed every word of the composition—every word of it. But people who have never been in Nebraska will not understand about its flowers. Walter," he continued, turning to the boy, "I believe that this year has been most useful for you. You have gone over the books which other boys study in school, you have learned to hunt; but most of all, and this is the point I wish to bring out, you have learned to interpret nature. Perhaps in years to come you will better understand what I am saying." Then the doctor suddenly rose to his feet, as he realized how seriously he was speaking. "Come! come! come!" he cried. "I must not be preaching to you the last night which you have to spend with us."

"It is hard to realize that he is to leave us," said the wife.

"How quickly the year has gone," added the boy.

"And you were homesick only once," were the words of Dr. Murt.

"Yes, only once," replied Walter. "I was too busy to think of home."

"Then he arose and over the mound he scattered the petals of white and pink and red."—*Page* 198

"Yes, my wife and I did keep you pretty busy."

"And little Rolly and the Seyons," said Walter; "all of you were so kind."

"It was a great pleasure for us," claimed Mrs. Murt.

"For four years in Chicago I talked to you about hunting on the Loup River; and now—now—the sport is all over. But you are young and I am young. Some day you may return and spend at least a few weeks with us," and unconsciously the doctor relaxed into his serious mood.

Far into the night they talked, rehearsing over and over again the incidents of the past year—the hunting, the storm, the death of little Rolly.

. . . . . .

The morning train bore Walter Blakestone to Omaha. On the following day he was welcomed by his parents and sisters in Chicago.

. . . . . .

One day at the end of June a stranger walked into the yard, knocked at the kitchen

door and asked Mrs. Seyon whether he could speak with Mr. Dobbs.

"He is gone!" said she.

"And his little boy?"

"Dead," said the Belgian woman with a sigh.

"And you knew him?"

"Yes, I was like a mother to him all last winter."

"May I sit down?" the stranger asked; "my name is Ignatius Bararana. They called me Ig."

"Oh! I heard them speak of you so often, so very often; and little Rollin called you Ig."

Then Mrs. Seyon told him all that had happened, and when she had finished she pointed through the trees to the top of the hill. "He is buried there," she whispered.

He asked for a cup of water but she forced him to stay and have some food. When he had eaten he thanked the woman, then said, "I will go to the grave and pray."

Along the hillside wild roses grew in riotous profusion. He gathered a great cluster of them. By the side of the little grave Ignatius Bararana prayed. Then he arose and over the mound he scattered the petals of white and pink and red.

Then he raised his eyes to heaven, blessed himself with the sign of the cross, and went down into the valley at the foot of the sand-hills.

THE END

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